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Patricia Schmiedlechner

Modi Operandi in Rubens's Workshop

A Study on the Creative Process and Studio Practice



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A Study on the Creative Process and Studio Practice

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1. Introduction

To date, Peter Paul Rubens is one of the most successful artists to have ever lived. Born to an influential family, Rubens was highly educated and besides his main profession as a master painter, he had numerous scholarly interests and corresponded with the intellectual elite of his time. Partly due to his large private and professional network, he was temporarily in diplomatic service to the Habsburg Governors of the Southern Netherlands, Albert VII, Archduke of Austria and his wife Isabella Clara Eugenia. Despite these interests and obligations, Rubens's main profession was that of a master painter for the larger part of his life: he was a master of the Guild of Saint Luke for a little over 40 years, from 1598 until his passing at the age of 62 in 1640. His artistic œuvre is extensive, comprising hundreds of paintings, as well as drawings, oil sketches and prints. His designs not only prepare paintings but also architecture, sculpture and applied arts, such as title pages.[1] The works show a wide variety of subjects, transformations of style, and to some degree inconsistencies in what can best be paraphrased as "quality". As was self-evident for a successful master of painting during the 17th century, and indispensable in view of the sheer amount of his artistic output, Rubens ran a large workshop. Given the vital role that this workshop played in his art production, the subject of his studio and the organisational aspects behind the artistic powerhouse have not been studied as thoroughly as one might anticipate. This disproportionate discrepancy is owed to a number of circumstances. One reason is the fact that – unlike other aspects of Rubens's life – his workshop is poorly documented. When Rubens returned from his travels to Italy, he was appointed court painter to Albert and Isabella Clara Eugenia. This prestigious appointment exempted him from having to register his pupils with the guild. Consequently, the guild's legers reveal very little about Rubens's teaching activities or his employees.[2] Other, less reliable sources associate a number of painters with Rubens's studio, although they rarely offer a decisive argument or proof.[3]

1 The different media have more recently been awarded more scholarly attention. For a long overdue study on Rubens's title pages, see for instance: Bertram 2018.

2 During Rubens's lifetime, artists and other craftsmen were traditionally organised in guilds, for protection and for the propagation of common interests and Rubens also became a master of the Guild of Saint Luke after his apprenticeship. Guilds kept books that made notes of who became a master when and who took on which pupil, and which are a great source of information for scholars.

3 Arnout Balis states that a list of all the painters connected with Rubens's studio in some way would easily include over one hundred names. For an in-depth study on the subject of Rubens's pupils and their identities, see: Balis 2007, p. 30–51.

A further reason why Rubens's pupils and employees may not have received as much scholarly attention over the past centuries is the radical change that has taken place in the cultural perception of art, as the modern understanding of art strongly differs from the perspectives of the 17th century. The roots of this development lie in Romanticism and the idolisation of the genius artist during the 18th and 19th centuries: the underlying principle of this unprecedented worship of the artist as a "genius" was the idea of an innate disposition (or a God-given gift) that originates from the innermost part of the soul. This development shaped the modern understanding insofar that today the prevalent understanding of art prioritises its implementation and creation. Prime importance is attached to the artist's creative idea, rather than merely the depicted subject itself. To the conventional present perception, "art" is imperatively linked to the imaginative and inventive "artist" and consequently a copy can merely be a lesser imitation of the "real thing".[4] The extent of the distinction between original and copy becomes clear when these parameters apply even though artworks no longer require manual implementation. This development culminated at the beginning of the 20th century with the *ready-made*, which shows the detachment of the original work of art from the artist's manual intervention. Art is no longer exclusively dependent on a pre-specified skillset, but rather it more strongly relies on the artist's creative idea. In other words, a modern artwork's value not only lies in its mere appearance, but importance is generally also attached to its conception and origination.

This modern understanding of art is completely disrupted when facing 17th-century practices such as the schematic reproduction of paintings, excessive copying activity, obscure attributions or an outright disregard for an artist's identity. Especially in the case of celebrated old masters such as Rubens, the existence of a workshop creates a maximum of conflict for the present perception, as Rubens's autograph works are sold at substantial sums. His paintings lead the list of most expensive old master paintings on the market. In July 2016, Christie's sold "*Lot and His Daughters*" for over £44 million, reflecting the highest price ever achieved for an Old Master painting at the long-established auction house. Today, the monetary value of a painting attributed to Rubens versus a painting connoted with his workshop significantly differs, being strongly disproportional to the historical difference in price at the time of their creation.[5] Evidently, the appeal of artistic genius is still instilled in today's consciousness to some degree.

4 In this context, Walter Benjamin's concept of "aura" can be mentioned. See for instance: Bratu Hansen 2008, p. 336ff.

5 A work done by one of Rubens's pupils was worth approximately half as much as a work done by the master himself, according to a letter that Rubens wrote to William Trumbull in 1621. See: Magurn 1955, p. 76.

Even outside of the art market, works "by the studio" simply do not evoke the same enthusiasm and interest as their (apparently) single-handedly-executed counterparts.[6] This applies to almost all parties involved with art, from non-specialists such as museum visitors to academics conducting research. Questions of attribution invariably hold serious consequences for the painting's owner, regardless whether private or institutional. As a result of this, paradoxical situations arise, such as the fact that two similar versions of a composition are often both classified as works by Rubens.[7] For instance, the *New Hermitage Museum* in St. Petersburg housed an exhibition titled "*Rubens's Ceres: Two original Versions*".[8] This not only applies to paintings but also to Rubens's preparatory material. For example, two nearly identical sketches of Nicolas Trigault are both classified as works by the master himself. Neither the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York nor the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm care to officially declare their respective version as a copy by the studio.[9] However, with consideration of the socio-historical context in which the works were done – namely the existence of Rubens's large workshop and his aforementioned passions and obligations – it can safely be assumed that he neither had time nor leisure to independently make copies of his own work. Making copies was traditionally one of the main tasks assigned to pupils and employees during the 17th century. Consequently, when faced with two versions of a composition, one of the two works should be attributed to his workshop. However, decisions like these are often met with reluctance from both parties involved. No private owner wants to see his/her own works excluded from the esteemed realm of originals – not to speak of the monetary loss – and curators generally feel the same way about the collections entrusted to them. It is therefore not entirely surprising that disagreements concerning the origin and production of a painting have caused frictions between even the most prestigious of institutions.[10]

6 Peter van den Brink points out an interesting fact, namely that copies after Pieter Brueghel the Elder by his son Pieter the Younger have a much higher monetary value in the modern market than anonymous copies after Rubens, Rembrandt or other celebrated artists. These were by no means loose adaptations of subjects, but rather faithful imitations. Evidently, the market is less reluctant towards copies when they can be associated with a famous name. Van den Brink 2001, p. 14.

7 The reasons for assuming that Rubens would not ever have made copies of his own work will be discussed in more detail in the following.

8 See: Cat.-St.Petersburg 2007.

9 For illustrations of both sketches see: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 41/43.

10 A recent example is the open dispute between the *BRCP (Bosch Research and Conservation Project)* and the *Museo National del Prado* in Madrid, following the BRCP's disattribution of paintings such as "*The Temptation of Saint Anthony*" or "*The Table of the Seven Deadly Sins*".

Questions concerning Rubens's workshop production (which are linked to the issue of authorship) are invariably associated with the problem of how the viewer perceives and values the "historic" artwork. For instance, research from the 19th century exposes the cultural perceptions of that time from the way in which scholars dealt with art, the way in which questions were asked and certainly from the way in which they were answered.[11] In short, reading about what a 19th century scholar wrote about Rubens will predominantly reveal the views and beliefs of that time, while not necessarily offering a credible illustration of historical contexts. Rubens's "legacy" was appropriated in numerous ways, including – for instance – the exploitation of his fame in connection with Belgian nationalism.[12]

In the context of research on Rubens's workshop practices, the powerful narrative of favouring single-handed old master paintings has had the greatest impact, whereby pioneering art historians such as Max J. Friedländer attached anachronistic concepts to 17th-century art as a way to deal with this issue. For instance, in his earlier publications, Friedländer denied the existence of Rubens's workshop and stated that his œuvre could have only been the work of a true genius.[13] He trusted in the existence of a large number of autograph paintings and thus strongly focused on the question of attribution. Other attempts at dealing with this conflict lie in categorising the workshop member's artistic efforts as substandard. Consequently, all works that show a high level of "quality" could be categorised as autograph. According to this concept, the master's hand was inimitable and painting's that show stylistic weaknesses were in turn the product of his less talented employees or pupils. The foundation for this assumption was already laid very early onwards, shortly after Rubens's death, as Roger de Piles sought to defend Rubens's status by explaining the fluctuations in his œuvre with the shortcomings of is employees.[14] This is conceivable to some degree, as Rubens was undoubtedly a very talented painter and when – for instance – bodily proportions are not plausibly depicted, it is reasonable to assume that

11 This most notably includes a strong shift in how "the artist" was perceived, and the emerging idea of the artistic "genius". It comes as no surprise that Rubens's workshop production was not highlighted during this time and the workshop's existence was sometimes even completely denied. However, invariably 19th-century views contributed to shape our contemporary understandings.

12 For example, in 1904 Max Rooses described Rubens with the following words: *"He is the greatest of the sons of his city and his country, one of the two or three greatest ever produced by his race. [...] Privileged to be the heir of a long succession of masters of the brush, he possessed the most precious gifts of the Flemish genius to an incomparable degree. [...] He transformed our national school, and dominated it"* (see: Rooses 1904, p. 7.).

13 See: Friedländer 1922, p. 9–10. This is not to say that there were no contrary positions. Scholars such as Hanns Floercke had incredibly progressive views on workshop structures as early as 1905. However, next to academic powerhouses such as Friedländer, too little notice was taken of these relatively marginal opinions (see: Floerke 1905, for details on Rubens's workshop, see p. 137–138).

14 See: Teyssèdre 1958, p. 134.

his hand was not involved in their making. However, assuming that Rubens therefore completed all paintings of high quality on his own is a false conclusion. As will be shown, Rubens himself was interested in ensuring that his workshop produced works of consistent quality and he would not have profited from strong fluctuations in his staff's painting style.

Although the existence of Rubens's workshop is universally accepted today, few studies exist on Rubens's workshop practice and painting technique, and they are surprisingly scarce in relation to the extensive amount of literature on Rubens. This is partly due to the fact that the inclusion and analysis of Rubens's painting technique – naturally fuelled during recent decades by current technological developments – has hardly ever been subject to mainstream art historical research.[15] Of course, it is determined by interdisciplinary collaborations between art historians and conservators. For instance, innovative research on Rubens's painting technique has been conducted by Arnout Balis, often in correlation with exhibitions, such as the catalogue for the exhibition at the *National Museum of Western Art* in 1993. The accompanying catalogue was published by Toshiharu Nakamura and it mainly dealt with the issue of numerous versions of one composition.[16] However, Rubens's workshop and studio practice has rarely ever been the main focus of publications.

On the other hand, media such as oil sketches or drawings that illustrate the design process have been subject to extensive research. In light of Rubens's workshop, the preliminary works are often seen as the direct and untarnished testimonies of his autograph hand. Rubens's drawings were famously researched by some of the most influential Rubens scholars, such as Ludwig Burchard.[17] Leo van Puyvelde made a first attempt to catalogue Rubens's oil sketches in 1940.[18] The catalogues by Julius Held dedicated to Rubens's drawings and oil sketches respectively stand out in this context.[19] They remain the most comprehensive publications in the field, although further artworks have appeared over the intervening years. Additionally, Anne-Marie Logan's research

15 Rare, distinct studies on the subject include: Wadum 1996; Wadum 2002; Gepts 1954-60.

16 Toshiharu Nakamura's goal was to shed more light on the production of copies in the Rubens workshop. He argues that copies were primarily made by Rubens's staff, while the production of the first "original" version was done by the master himself. In this publication, Arnout Balis mainly dealt with the question of which students were working in Rubens's studio at what time. See: Cat.-Tokyo 1993. Other publications that focus on Rubens's painting technique and studio practice include: Balis 2007; Balis/Van Hout 2012.

17 In 1928 Glück and Haberditzl published "*Die Handzeichnungen von Peter Paul Rubens*" and the aforementioned publication by d'Hulst and Burchard was published in 1963. See: Glück/Haberditzl 1928; Burchard/d'Hulst 1963. Of course, the drawings have also been subject of research within the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard series, although in this case they are discussed according to subject.

18 See: Van Puyvelde 1940.

19 See for instance: Held 1986; Held 1980.

on Rubens's drawings warrant mention.[20] Friso Lammertse and Alejandro Vergara published the most recent work on oil sketches in the context of an exhibition at the *Museo Nacional del Prado* in Madrid.[21] The general assumption in the context of preparatory works is that of the sequential creative process, in which each step builds upon the previous one. For instance, typically the oil sketch is preceded by the drawing and succeeded by the finished work. A number of exhibition catalogues over recent decades have focused on Rubens's preparatory material.[22] Accordingly, the focus is usually placed on a specific accumulation of Rubens's works. Moreover, research in this form has most generally focused on specific aspects of Rubens's production.

The aim of the following work is to deliver a strategy or approach seeking to define and examine Rubens's preparatory process, continuously from the first draft of a composition to the finished work. In this respect, it is taken into account that the preliminary works not only served a creative purpose but were also important mediums for the workshop. This includes the work's utilisation as a means of communication between Rubens and his staff, as well as their function in connection with teaching activities.

Firstly, in order to provide the reader with an overview of the subject matter, the socio-historical backdrop against which Rubens's artworks were produced will be briefly assessed. This will include thoughts on the contemporaries' estimation of authorship and single-handed execution. In the following, details of Rubens's workshop structure will be examined with the help of contemporary sources, whereby sources such as letters or contemporary reports offer relevant insights. However, often these documents are predominantly telling regarding the author's agenda and have to be critically analysed. Thereafter, the evidence of a general "standard" creative process comprising ongoing steps that increasingly worked out compositions until culminating in the finished painting will be assessed. The subsequent two chapters will deal with the issue of connoisseurship, whereby – among others – the connoisseur's dependency on an artist's single-handed core œuvre will be questioned and assessed.

With respect to Rubens's process, the artworks themselves can offer insights and one goal was to evaluate what can be said about Rubens's creative approach, studio practice and methods of workmanship based on the available material. This will be exemplified with a case study, which was chosen as a telling example of a high-ranking commissioned work: the altarpiece "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*". The extensive amount of associated preparatory material made

20 See: Cat.-NewYork 2004.

21 See: Cat.-Madrid 2018.

22 See for instance: Cat.-Antwerp 1977; Cat.-NewYork 1995; Cat.-Rotterdam 2003; Lammertse 2003; Cat.-Cincinnati 2004; Cat.-New York 2004; Cat.-Madrid 2018.

this a telling example and the varying works are evaluated in respect to their informative value concerning Rubens's creative process and working method. The works will be discussed regarding the context of their origin with full deference to contemporary sources. The socio-historical contexts as well as investigations of the materials are taken into consideration to widen the attribution process. After an analytical and critical analysis, selected comparative examples are used to further investigate the painting process and illustrate the tools of the workshop's creative production. In this context, the question of which other factors besides stylistic and qualitative criteria can be taken into consideration when looking to attribute Rubens's artworks will be addressed. Finally, the issue of whether the task area of Rubens's employees was strictly defined or if Rubens ran a more flexible corporate structure will be examined.

The consciousness of the fact that a scholar's view of history is invariably linked to previously existing categories and his/her subjective outlook is associated with a radical methodological change in the human sciences, which has fundamentally determined the methodical discourse over the last 50 years.[23] As will be shown in the following chapters, research questions similar to those that will be addressed in this dissertation have previously been criticised for being anachronistic, meaning that Rubens's working methods (as well as searching for the executing "hand") would not have held interest to the contemporary viewer and are thus inappropriately applied.[24] However, the contemporary viewer's alleged perception – irrespective of whether the "original" was valued or not – can in no case be equated with the present-day understanding of the term "original", even if they should superficially overlap in certain aspects. The art market aside, the question of the extent to which the master's own hand was involved in making an artwork remains central to those scholars whose study depends upon the integrity of the physical artwork. Consequently, the contemporaneous significance of a subject can hardly be set as the determining factor for present-day research, insofar as any consideration is inherently linked to the scholar's preconceived assumptions or circumstances due to the historicity of the subject matter. In other words, while the objective was to obtain and maintain a strong awareness of the multi-layered contexts (social, historical, economic etc.), it was never an attempt to reconstruct the past.

23 This process can be summarised under the term of "*New Art History*". The development brought a boost of "scientification" to the subject of art history, which was based on a number of new theoretical approaches.

24 For instance, Ernst van de Wetering – head of the Rembrandt Research project – held the opinion that if contemporary viewers would have found it natural to regard all works produced in a studio as works by the studio's master, even if they were not done by his own hand, then the idea to isolate works of a master's hand from that of his pupils and assistants would be a complete anachronism, a wrongly-applied projection of the 19th-century cult of genius to everyday 17th-century workshop practice. See: Wetering 1993, p. 627–630.

2. Innovation and Art: Antwerp as a Centre of Production and Sale

Given that our modern outlook on art and its appreciation so strongly differs from historical circumstances, these past conditions must be closely examined to make constructive progress when examining workshop processes. In order to avoid potential bias and adequately discuss the making of 17th-century art, it is necessary to establish an understanding of the then-existing conception of artistry and craftsmanship. This also includes details on an artwork's reception by contemporary viewers, and in a further step the issue of which factors played a role in determining an artwork's value. A strong awareness of historic cultural perceptions should precede – and form the foundation of – any consideration. Accordingly, the following chapters aim to provide the reader with a concise and solid overview, invoking the current state of research.

2.1. An Evolving Art Market

To begin with, it seems necessary to clarify the potentially confusing and somewhat elusive term of "art market". In the context of this work, the term will stand for the arena in which works of art ware transferred from the producer to the buyer, either directly or through a third party.[25] It should be made clear that the art market was a heterogeneous structure, influenced by a wide range of diverse production and various buying patterns. With this in mind, the main focus of this publication will lie on developments in the Southern Provinces, particularly Antwerp. The conditions of sale could strongly vary from city to city, partly due to diverse guild regulations. Additionally, varying forms of production and intermediate trade contributed to sustaining a multiplicity of selling practices and helped to mould a very heterogeneous market.

When artworks initially became increasingly accessible to a broader stratum of society during the 15th century, they were mainly commissioned for religious purposes such as private devotion.[26] During the 16th century, paintings had newly risen to the status of a key player in market economics and economising changes to the production process helped to meet the demands of an ever-growing range of customers. It is important to note that the price spectrum was wide ranging and it would be a mistake to make general statements about paintings or artworks without taking this into account.

25 For a corresponding definition of "art market", see: Tattersall 1996, p. 558.

26 For an study on the development of the art market in the Southern Netherlands during the 15th century, see: Campbell 1976.

The more expensive side of this spectrum was still by no means accessible to the wider public. However, it is safe to assume that paintings had never previously been bought by a wider range of people.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the methods of producing and marketing art in the Netherlands underwent noticeable changes. A lot of scholarly attention has focused on developments in the Dutch Republic during the 17th century, and although this was indeed a time of great innovation, a lot of change had already taken place in the preceding century. Most notably, it would be an error to assume that the Southern Provinces were isolated from developments in the Dutch Republic. These two territories cannot be seen as segregated cultural areas and the assumption that they were split into two religiously-homogenous zones – namely an altogether catholic south and a completely protestant north – has been refuted.[27]

During the 16th century, there were substantial changes concerning the way in which art was bought and sold. Prior to the 15th century, the church and nobility would commission art almost exclusively, and regardless of whether it was a commissioned work or not paintings were generally bought directly from the artist who made them, without intermediation of third parties.[28] The artist's studio not only served as a production site, but also simultaneously as a showroom and selling location. Buyers knew whom they were buying from, and the ownership of artworks was generally linked to patronage. Moreover, the whole selling process was strongly regulated by the towns' guilds. As previously mentioned, guild regulations varied from city to city, but despite varying degrees of stringency, a common goal was to exercise quality control and maintain a certain monopoly. This was achieved through policies such as regulating imports and openly practising nepotism. For instance, sons of masters enjoyed facilitated conditions of entry.[29] Even though the written-down regulations cannot always be equated with historic actualities and a certain "rules versus play" must be considered, the guild rules allow us to draw some conclusions regarding the art market. For instance, only masters were permitted to sell paintings for their own profit and the privilege to sell was limited to one site per person in some cities. The guilds

27 In this context, the international symposium on *"Art and Catholicism"* held in the *Städel Museum* in Frankfurt offered key insights. In respect to Rubens's relevance and reputation in the Dutch Republic, as a painter who is often deemed to be perhaps the most significant artist of the "Counter Reformation", the Evening Lecture of Nils Büttner proved very insightful. Büttner convincingly illustrated how the work of Rubens – a catholic painter by all means – was overwhelmingly represented in Amsterdam during his lifetime.

28 This is not applicable to tapestries, which were already then commonly sold by dealers. This is mainly due to the extremely high cost of production, which often prevented weavers to act as their own retailers and necessitated investors who put up the capital. See: Thomson 1973, p. 189–222.

29 On the regulations of Antwerp's Guild of Saint Luke, see: Vermeylen 2003, P. 130ff; Maximiliaan Martens offers in-depth insights on the statutes in Bruges: Martens 1998, p. 19ff.

likewise monitored which artists had the right to display and sell their produce via a shop window and the sale of imported paintings was often restricted.[30] Conditions were relaxed at annual fairs – so-called *jaarmarkten* – during which the regulations were suspended and trading with art produced outside of the respective city was made possible.

During the course of the 16th century, markets became increasingly relevant as points of sale, and in the case of Antwerp the so-called *panden* emerged.[31] *Panden* were sale halls specifically designed to market luxury goods. Although they originally opened concurrently with the *jaarmarkten*, from the mid-16th century onwards these sales locations were accessible all year round. The *panden* were a vital part of Antwerp's commercial infrastructure and numerous sales halls existed throughout the city.[32] Over time, most of the halls specialised in a specific luxury product. For instance, the *schilderspand* primarily focused – albeit without limitation – on paintings.[33] Foreign artists and merchants could rent a stall and the *panden* played a significant role in establishing Antwerp's export trade.

In addition to these specialised markets, entirely new selling models developed. Aside from shop windows and annual fairs, art was sold via unprecedented channels such as auctions, lotteries and most importantly through professional dealers. Art dealers became influential to such an extent that it became customary to admit *beeldvercopere* into the Guild of Saint Luke.[34] In addition to the primary market, a notable secondary market for paintings developed.[35] This market was largely fuelled by the selling of estates and is comparatively well documented due to probate records.

30 On workshops and working methods of painters active in the Southern Netherlands during the 15th century, see: Campbell 1981.

31 In 1517, the *pand* nearby the Church of Our Lady practically became permanent fixture. See: Van den Brink 2001, p. 20.

32 This was not a phenomenon specific to Antwerp. In Bruges, from 1482 onwards the annual market was held in the "*Pand*" close to the Franciscan friary. In 1508, a second market took place each January. Van den Brink 2001, p. 16.

33 On the emergence of the *panden*, a unique Antwerp phenomenon see: Vermeylen 2003, p. 15ff.

34 In Antwerp, the art dealer Jan Meduwael became a master of the guild as early as 1518 (See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 89). However, Meduwael was somewhat of an isolated case and the acceptance of dealers *(beeldvercooper, cunstvercooper or heylichvercoopere)* only became more habitual from the 1560s onwards. See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 217ff.

35 For instance, it was possible to acquire paintings by Rubens on the secondary market from around 1620 onwards. These works are not to be confused with "paintings after Rubens" by other artists, which were also available in the open market. Since Rubens's specific style of painting was in high demand, other artists created imitations based on Rubens's recognisable stylistic characteristics. These works are generally categorised as "school" of Rubens today. See: Büttner 2006, p. 118.

Antwerp rose to a central position within the European trade network when shipping routes moved from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean and general economic growth went hand in hand with the expansion of the art market.[36] In contrast to other artistic centres across Europe, where painters were primarily active for regional buyers, the Flemish market was spurred by pan-European demand.[37] Thus, Antwerp provided numerous venues for selling art and a large wealthy elite increased the demand for luxury goods. Linked to high demand, the number of working artists rapidly increased. In Antwerp, between 1470 and 1479, a total of 114 masters and apprentices were newly registered in the Guild of Saint Luke.[38] By the 1520s, this number had grown by 150% to a total of 286 registrations.

This prosperous expansion of Antwerp's economy and the art market did not continue steadily until Rubens's lifetime. The political crises and the recession during the second half of the 16th century left a disastrous impact on the artistic sector. The luxury market was particularly susceptible to any form of political turmoil as it was dependant on long-distance trade and foreign markets. Religious conflict and a period of Calvinist rule that perpetrated waves of iconoclasm led to large-scale emigration, including a large part of the previously-thriving artistic community. It is difficult to determine when exactly full recession hit the city, but in 1585 the river Scheldt was closed and at that point Antwerp had doubtlessly lost its huge economic importance.[39]

Antwerp never fully re-established itself as the capital of commerce north of the Alps and during the 17th century the Dutch Republic emerged as the new major player in the art market and international trade.[40]

36 On Antwerp's rise to becoming Europe's most powerful mercantile city, see: Van der Wee/Materné 1993, passim.

37 For instance, Italian collections show significant shares of imported works. See: Nuttall 2004.

38 The preserved records of the Guild of St. Luke are kept in the Royal Academy of Antwerp and were published by Philippe-Felix Rombouts and Theódoor van Lerius between 1864 and 1876: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a. The accounts begin with 1453 and from 1469 onwards apprentices and their respective instructors are listed in addition to newly-accepted masters (Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 19).

39 Even long before this date, Antwerp had experienced a number of economic setbacks. For instance, in 1557, the Spanish state bankruptcy had dire consequences for the city's financiers, jeopardising the city's dominant position as a financial hub. However, the city was able to recover and experienced another economic upswing around 1560. See: Vermeylen 2003, p. 40; Van der Wee 1963, II, p. 213–222.

40 According to probate inventory attributions, the number of artists active in the Dutch Republic blew up during the first decades of the 17th century. In 1619, there were four times as many working painters than there had been in 1600, and by 1639 this number had doubled again. See: de Vries 1991, p. 256ff.

Nevertheless, prosperity eventually returned to the city. During the first decade of the 17th century, the number of guild registrations showed a staggering 610 new admissions.[41] To some extent, Rubens's choice to reside in his war-torn hometown further contributed to rehabilitate the city's reputation as an artistic centre.

2.2. Changes in Painting Processes and Workshop Organisation

As discussed in the previous chapter, by the middle of the 16th century Antwerp had become the main location for both the production and distribution of art in the Netherlands, as well as being a major player in the European art market. However, not only the selling and marketing aspect continuously progressed throughout the century, but also the production of art itself, which underwent economical adjustments. With growing demand and a rising number of active artists, it is unsurprising that the way in which paintings were manufactured adapted to changing circumstances.

For one, the painting process was progressively streamlined to enable maximum efficiency and output. This not only applied to paintings, but the production of other forms of art such as sculptures and carved retables underwent a similar process of rationalisation.[42] Not all changes were new and unprecedented, but developments picked up with growing demand.[43] Painters increasingly used one design for a number of compositions – in simple terms, recycling their ideas – and a collection of reusable patterns became an important component of any painter's

41 See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 94–113/p. 410–459. To some extent, any increase in admissions is naturally linked to the demographic expansion of the city. Around 1500, Antwerp had a population of approximately 50,000. Before the start of the Eighty Years' War in 1568, the city had grown to over 100,000 inhabitants, making it an enormous metropolis by contemporary standards. However, during the first decade of the 17th century, the total population had declined again to around 50,000. The rise in enrolment thusly indicates a growing artistic sector. See: Vermeylen 2003, p. 37.

42 On the standardisation process of carved retables for the open market and an extensive bibliography, see: Jacobs 1998.

43 Paintings have been produced on a serial basis since the 15th century; for instance, Jan van Eyck duplicated his compositions.

equipment.[44] These sketchbooks went beyond the model books of the previous decades, whose purpose had primarily been to provide a stock of motifs rather than being tools to aid the painting process. Designs were at times transferred by auxiliary techniques such as the tracing of outlines and pouncing, and in some instances these working steps can still be identified under the paint surface with the use of modern technologies.[45] Although it is very difficult to make general statements, it is safe to say that across the board paintings were produced as efficiently as possible and the general trend went towards producing paintings on spec for the open market rather than designing individual pieces for specific customers.[46] For obvious reasons, this excluded genres such as portraiture, although in most other genres the growing market and its indirect sales outlets encouraged anticipatory production.

The changing the method of production was accompanied by a change in the structure of workshops.[47] In general, it is assumed that the size of workshops grew, not least because the growing importance of periodic markets required artists to build up a supply of paintings in advance. However, the extent to which the workshops grew and whether they expanded across the pricing spectrum has been subject to debate. Maximiliaan Martens and Natasja Peeters have shown that according to the membership lists of the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke, the vast majority of masters employed three apprentices or fewer.[48] However, these numbers do not paint an entirely accurate picture in the sense that these lists only reveal the number of masters and apprentices, the only two professional groups who were required to register. The structures within

44 The extent to which studies and drawings were esteemed an important part of artistic property is shown in a dispute between Gerard David and his former pupil Ambrosius Benson. The details of their legal confrontation were complicated, but emphasis on the right of ownership becomes abundantly clear. For a summary of the dispute, see: Ainsworth 1998, p. 7. With time, working with a collection of designs became standard practice, which was especially the case for Rubens, who treasured his collection of drawings to such an extent that he specifically mentioned them in his will. He stipulated that his sketchbook was only to be sold after the last of his sons – or future sons-in-law – had decided against the profession of a painter. Consequently, the collection of designs remained family property until 1657 – seventeen years after Rubens's death – when his youngest daughter entered a convent. Rubens's testament was published by Pieter Génard in 1882, see: Génard 1896.

45 For a study on changes in technique such as pouncing, particularly in the œuvre of Gérard David, see: Ainsworth 1994. On the usage of cartoons in the workshop of Bernard van Orley, see: Van den Brink 1995.

46 A change in technique and signs of collaborative working methods can be seen in the works of numerous artists scattered locally, such as Bernard van Orley, Pieter Coecke van Aelst, Gerard David, Jan van Scorel and Maarten van Heemskerck. See respectively: Ainsworth 2006; Jansen 2006; Berrie/Metzger 1995; Faries/Steinbüchel/Van Asperen de Boer 1995.

47 On the issue of cost-cutting strategies, division of labour and changes in workshop practice, see: Martens 1998, p. 19; Vermeylen 2003, p. 5; Faries 2006, p. 1ff; Campbell 1981, p. 44ff.

48 According to guild records, between 1500 and 1579 only seven masters employed more than five apprentices. See: Martens/Peeters 2006, p. 211ff.

a studio were undoubtedly much more complex and involved a number of different working relationships, depending on the employee's level of expertise and many other factors. One occupational group that was not required to register with the guild were journeymen, referred to as *gezellen* or *knapen*.[49] Unlike apprentices – whose contracts generally included the agreement on what instructions the pupil was to receive and entailed an apprenticeship fee – journeymen were trained painters who were hired for their workforce. As Lorne Campbell highlights, a study of the Tournai guild records reveals that painters took an average of 7.7 years between finishing an apprenticeship and becoming independent masters.[50] Furthermore, there was a high degree of mobility and most artists who became masters had not served their apprenticeship in Tournai. The Haarlem guild even stipulated that in order to become a master, a painter had to work for a minimum of three years as an apprentice and at least one additional year as a journeyman.[51] This would indicate that at any given time at least one-quarter of the apprenticed workforce operated under the radar of guild records. Presumably this number was many times higher, given that not all painters ended up becoming masters and some must have remained as employees throughout their career.

A closer look at the Antwerp's guild records show a very similar picture. While a comprehensive study of all apprentices registered would exceed the scope of this dissertation, samples indicate a strong resemblance to the conditions indicated above. Not all apprentices stayed in Antwerp to acquire the status of master, and if they did, it generally took six to ten years.[52] The extent of the deviation between guild records and actual workshop size at times is further exemplified by the workshop of Frans Floris, who – according to Karel van Mander – had 120 assistants working for him throughout his lifetime, employing a large and highly productive studio.[53] However, the guild records only mention a single pupil.[54]

49 In general, a *gezel* was a person who associated with or accompanied someone else. As Liesbeth Helmus highlights, within the context of craftsmen's guilds the term more specifically characterised an individual who was no longer an apprentice or servant, but had yet to achieve the level of a master. See: Helmus 2006, p. 203.

50 See: Campbell 1981, p. 48.

51 The elaborate draft statutes date from 1631. See: Tummers 2009, p. 98.

52 Random samples include Damian Ortelsman (apprenticed in 1534/registered as master in 1545), Bertele Goes (1540/1549), Cornelis Priers (1549/1554), Cornelis Mettereeren (1550/1556), Nicasus Duryn (1550/1557), and Coppen Ghenoots (1523/1535). For a publication of the full records, see: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a.

53 Van Mander 1617, p. 321.

54 See: Van de Velde 1975a, p. 441.

In any case, forms of expansion inevitable promoted changes in execution such as a division of labour. With differing proficiency levels within a workshop, distributing tasks according to the members' abilities seemed the only logical consequence to ensure a consistent product.

The major changes to the way of selling and the production of art left an irreversible imprint on local practice and a declining market could not fully undo newly-developed habits. This becomes apparent when looking at artists who left behind extensive œuvres. They confirm these methods of production, simply due to the fact that they generated an output far beyond the abilities of any individual. Rubens himself serves as a good example: on average, his studio produced three paintings every two weeks, a production rate that is only conceivable against the background of a well-functioning workshop.

2.3. Catalysts for Changes in Subject Matter

The increase in efficiency changed artistic output in more ways than simply the number of paintings produced per artist. Inevitably, the product itself also became amended, due to new methods and the changing market. The degree of interdependence of economic factors and creative work is still subject of scholarly debate. For a long time, changes in technique and style were only conceivable as results of artistic creativity, affected at the very most by a continuous progression of style. However, John Michael Montias rightly states that in art it hardly possible to keep "product" and "process" innovation distinct, as any cost-cutting innovation will generally affect the appearance of the product.[55] Accordingly, it is impossible to alter the way in which a painting is made without changing its appearance to some extent. Changes manifested themselves not only in the manner of execution, but they also contributed to shaping the content of paintings.

One development lay in the phenomenon of artistic specialisation. In a large market, excelling in a certain field undoubtedly offered unparalleled opportunity to distinguish oneself and defy competition. The result of this development had a strong impact and opened the way for an emergence of new distinct genres within painting. Furthermore, the range of subjects worthy of artistic representation adapted to a growing and changing clientele. The Antwerp Mannerists can be cited as one example among many, as a group of painters who produced specific subjects in a recognisable style, in line with international demand. This specialisation on particular genres

55 In the late 1980s, John Michael Montias strongly influenced the field of interdisciplinary research between art history and economics. The introduction of the concept of product and process innovation in relation to artworks is referred to as the "Montias innovation thesis". See: Montias 1990, p. 52ff.

opened the way for fruitful collaborations between different studios, a phenomenon that was later often found in Rubens's œuvre. Indeed, Rubens would collaborate with fellow masters such as Frans Snyders, an expert in the depiction of animals.[56] Even within a specific genre, there was sufficient competition to allow for further specialisation. Certain artists made conscious use of stylistic differentiation to encourage the development of distinctive market identities and thus achieve a competitive advantage. Frans Hals can be cited as a noteworthy example in this regard, as he employed his pictorial methods intentionally, successively emphasising the characteristic sketchy execution.[57]

Furthermore, new production processes naturally promoted the production of copies and similar versions of compositions. Until today, numerous variants of a design pose a difficulty when it comes to determinig their origin and the chronological order of their creation.[58] Opinions on the main cause of more elusive changes in art such as style and subject matter strongly differ. Some scholars see the Italian influence as a driving force. Flemish artists were indeed increasingly influenced by Italian art, notably by the works of Michelangelo and Raphael. During the 15th century, painters from the Netherlands began visiting Italy more frequently to perfect their training. Commercial routes simplified the journey and besides further aspects such as religious motives, Italy increasingly offered various job opportunities for northern artists.[59] Concurrently, influential compositions found the way north, making Italian ideas accessible to those who did not undertake the prestigious journey themselves.[60]

56 Snyders would paint the animal for subjects such as *"Prometheus Bound"*. One version of this subject is kept in the *Philadelphia Museum of Art* (W1950-3-1).

57 Christopher Atkins refers to Hals's specific stylistic differentiation as his "signature style". He derived this term from two concepts coined by Richard Wolheim, namely that of "individual style", which Wolheim describes as intentional and personal, as well as "signature" elements, which can reveal authorship but are not necessarily intentionally applied by the artist. Atkins 2012, p. 15. On the market's impact on Frans Hals's stylistic specialisation, see: ibid. p. 16ff.

58 On the subject of numerous version of one composition, see for instance: Cat.-Tokyo 1993; Van den Brink 2001; Büttner 2017.

59 In art theory, the benefits of a journey to Italy were reflected at a comparatively late stage. Karel van Mander – who himself had visited Italy between 1573 and 1577 – highlighted the importance of visiting Rome in 1614. On artists' journeys to Italy, see: Plagemann 2008.

60 Influential compositions such as Raphael's cartoons for the *"Age of the Apostles"* tapestry series found their way north and made huge impressions on local artists. Ainsworth 2006, p. 99ff.

Besides the more obvious stylistic references, the Italian influence is also seen as a factor concerning the shifts in workshop practices and painting techniques.[61] For instance, Maryan Ainsworth argues that Italian working methods were increasingly introduced to the Netherlands throughout the century, influencing the way in which paintings were designed and completed.[62]

Others see the reasons in a much wider, socio-economical context and regard the rise of capitalism as the main driving force.[63] For instance, Elizabeth Honig writes: "*In the course of the 16th century, capitalism emerged as the dominant, indeed the only mode of social organization of the economy; earlier modes of production persisted, but only insofar as they fit into a socio-political framework rooted in capitalism*".[64]

Ultimately, like any market, the art market was a demand-driven structure and while traditionally the majority of patrons were clergy or nobility, the 16th century brought an additional range of secular clients such as civic institutions and private patronage.[65] This included a strong demand for religious paintings for devotional purposes, although to a growing middle class a variety of secular genres also presented a way to heighten and cultivate their status. The extent to which artistic output is linked to demand is not least documented by Rubens's himself, whose production of numerous large format altarpieces is inseparably linked to the trends of the Counter Reformation.

61 For example, this was the case with underdrawings, which show certain changes in technique. On developments in underdrawings within the works of Jan van Scorel or Bernard van Orley, see respectively: Faries/Steinbüchel/Van Asperen de Boer 1995; Ainsworth 2006.

62 For an overview of Italian influences – particularly Raphael – on workshop practices of Bernard van Orley, see: Ainsworth 2006, p. 103ff.

63 The aforementioned American economist John Michael Montias strongly contributed to this assertion that market forces were a key factor in shaping the development of new styles and methods. See: Montias 1982; Montias 1990.

64 Honig 1998, p. 4.

65 For a study on how a continuous demand for artworks propelled the Italian art scene, see: Goldthwaite 1993. Filip Vermeylen applies the same categories to the Southern Netherlands. See: Vermeylen 2003, p. 141ff.

3. Individual Style and Workshop Production

Despite the progression towards a production process that involved the joint efforts of several people, during Rubens's lifetime there is no evidence of a particularly high esteem for single-handed execution as a result of this development. Although some painters achieved significantly higher prices than others, autograph work was hardly ever a requirement or part of a contract.[66] The situation is different concerning the question of authorship, which was in time affected by the previously-described changes in the art market.

3.1 The Value of Authorship in Rubens's Time

In 16th-century inventories, most of the listed artworks were not recorded with the artist's name and when they were, only a handful of painters were considered sufficiently important that their names were listed.[67] In Antwerp at the end of the 16th century, this canon of noteworthy names included around twelve artists, most prominently Frans Floris, Pieter Brueghel and Hieronymus Bosch.[68] Especially in the lower price segment, a strong deference to identities can confidently be ruled out. The standing of a painting was ensured by its image content and its fine craftsmanship, while the identity of its maker was largely considered negligible. An artist was primarily judged by his workmanship and paintings could be evaluated without background knowledge of their origin. After all, techniques such as fine painting were easily ascertainable by simply inspecting the painting in question.

66 See: Helmus 2006, p. 206. In Rubens's case, there are a few instances in which a contract between him and his patrons includes a section, which dictates an execution by the master himself; for instance, for the Medici Series the contract stipulated that Rubens was to paint all hands and faces by himself. Considering the number of paintings, this seems rather implausible and it likely that this section was included to assure the upmost quality. See for instance: Büttner 2006, p. 119.

67 See, among others: Büttner 2008b, p. 32; Sluijter 2008, p. 22; Montias 1982, p. 58; for instance, Montias references the art collection of Cornelis van Coolwijck – a tax collector from Delft – which was assessed in 1605. Not one artist's name is mentioned in connection to the 120 paintings in his possession.

68 For detailed patterns of attribution in those Antwerp inventories that contained more than one attribution (between 1550 and 1650), see: Honig 1995, p. 296–297.

However, during Rubens's lifetime the perception of artists' names associated with artworks changed: from the beginning of the 17th century onward, the percentage of paintings attributed began to rise slowly but gradually.[69] This circumstance must not be falsely understood as a growing appreciation of authorship, equal to the modern understanding. The majority of the works produced in the Netherlands were still made for the free market, and especially in this sector the names of the artists were generally less relevant. However, it cannot be denied that a growing number of artists acquired notable reputations, which transferred directly to a higher monetary value of their work.[70] If a painting was evidently higher priced simply through being connoted with the identity of a certain artist, where lies the difference to the modern understanding of authorship? To find an answer, one must examine the aspects in respect of which importance was attached to an artist's identity.

During Rubens's lifetime, writers such as Karel van Mander continued a tradition of recording artists' biographies, which had been begun by Giorgio Vasari in the middle of the 16th century.[71] One crucial purpose was to create a work of reference by which one could determine "good" art. These *literati* understood themselves as protectors of quality by establishing canons of noteworthy artists.[72] After all, fine taste was still considered an objective item, the limits of which could be rationally argued and determined. However, the previously-discussed changes to the way in which art was sold and the broader variety of consumers altered the situation. During prior centuries artworks were predominantly bought or commissioned directly from the artist who made them. Introducing third parties to the trade in the form of dealers and agents gave rise to uncertainties concerning the origins of the merchandise and numerous contemporary accounts

69 Research on inventories and sales records has been conducted by a number of scholars with varying focal points. Concerning the phenomenon of rising attributions, inventories show similar patterns, irrespective of the collections' proprietors or the town or region of origin. See: De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1996, p. 43; Honig 1995, p. 267; Tummers 2008, p. 38; John Michael Montias is especially aware of the fact that published inventories tend to over-represent the collections of wealthy burghers featuring a large number of attributed paintings. This can obviously lead to distorted results. However, he is confident that the rise in the relative importance of attributions represents a real phenomenon. See: Montias 1982, p. 222–227.

70 For examples of documents testifying to this *valore di stima*, see: Sluijter 2008, p. 10–13.

71 On Giorgio Vasari, see: De Girolami Cheney 2012; Olschki 1926. Mander published his first edition of the "*Schilder Boeck*" in 1604, in which he described the lives of over 250 artists. See for instance: Van Mander 1617.

72 It should be highlighted that the term "quality" was not used during the 17th century. To distinguish between varying degrees of workmanship, one generally used terms such as "good" and "beautiful".

bear testimony to legal disputes relating to artworks sold under false names.[73] In most cases, the claimant had purchased a painting from a dealer under fabricated or misleading information and the truth had come out coincidentally at a later date, usually through the input of a more knowledgeable third party.[74] Naturally this encouraged a growing demand for labelling and categorising. Moreover, the increasingly diverse consumer class was not always well equipped to identify inferior products and from the 1630s onward independent connoisseurs (neither dealers nor artists) appeared on the scene. Attaching more significance to the names of artists can thus be understood as a development within the scope of quality assurance. This is also emphasised by the fact that the elevation through reputation does not solely apply to the names of artists; indeed, the same can be said about appraised styles and schools.[75] A well-known artist did not bestow value upon his work by adding his personal, inimitable creative touch; in truth, the vital point was the quality associated with a well-known name. The argument against the valuing of an artist's personal touch is further strengthened by the fact that an artist's name did not represent a one-person show in any case, but rather a whole workshop, especially in the case of the more noteworthy artists.

3.2. Single-Handed Execution: Valued or Disregarded?

When discussing the importance of single-handed execution, it remains equally important to be conscious of the fact that our modern perceptions strongly differ from 17th-century views and opinions. Similar to the previous issue of valuing authorship, 17th-century workmanship is not compliant with our modern sense of value. The authenticity of a painting cannot be equated with the single-handedness of its execution. On the contrary, all paintings originating

73 Interestingly, at times the artists themselves opposed to the new developments. At the beginning of the 17th century, the Amsterdam Painters Guild filed a complaint to the mayor about dealers importing cheap copies and selling them for excessive prices. For details of this case and a listing of further accounts, see: De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1996, p. 36.

74 For a collection of such cases, see: Van der Veen 2005, p. 5ff.

75 Pieter Brueghel is a noteworthy example of an artist who deliberately copied the highly-esteemed style of Hieronymus Bosch to profit from its popularity. Likewise relevant in determining the monetary value of a painting was the purchasing patron. The Italian art dealer Giulio Mancini – familiar with the particularities of the trade – remarks in his *"Considerazioni Sulla Pittura": "a painting in itself cannot have a definite price,* [it] *is linked to the quality of the patron who owns it and the artist who makes it"*. On passages by Giulio Mancini, see: Tummers 2008, p. 46. The Rotterdam-born philosopher and satirist Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) wrote similarly: *"The Value that is set on Paintings depends not only on the Name of the Master [...] [but also on] the Quality of the Persons in whose Possession they are as well as the length of Time they have been in great Families"*. See: Mandeville 1924, I, p. 326.

from an artist's studio – even copies after his own creations – must be classified as "authentic" artworks. At the 23rd International Congress of Art History in 1992, Claus Grimm stated that when determining authorship in any 17th-century painting, the basic premise should be that of a collaborative painting process.[76] He suggests that contrary to the conventional approach – which considers most paintings autograph unless reason to doubt this is found – one should assume that a painting was completed with the help of assistants until substantial evidence suggests differently.[77] After all, it is well established nowadays that it was common practice for an artist to maintain a workshop. Producing artworks in collaboration with a workshop should be considered the standard practice of the 17th century. However, questions concerning the degree to which assistants were involved and more importantly how artists, dealers and buyers behaved towards these collaborative production procedures give rise to a variety of views.

Contemporary sources provide selective insights, which prove to be rather difficult to assemble into one coherent picture at first sight. On the one hand, it seems to have been a pleasurable elitist pastime to collectively analyse and dissect paintings, looking for characteristic brushstrokes that would allow for attribution.[78] This would virtually imply a strong consciousness of individual style. On the other hand, there is little room to doubt that the collaborative painting process represented common practice. Anna Tummers even speaks of a "*paradox of the seventeenth-century connoisseurship*".[79] She concludes that the solution to finding a connection between these seemingly contradicting issues lies in the art lover's deliberate limitation to masterly passages.[80] However, a further possible solution to this "paradox" lies in relinquishing the assumption that a pupil's input comprised an individual, stylistically-uniform contribution. Rather than applying our modern role concept to the issue of a disciple's artistic influence, we should bear in mind that it was not intended, that a pupil's brushstroke should strongly differ from his master's "style". On the contrary, members of a workshop were expected to strictly follow their master's

76 See: Grimm 1993, p. 643.

77 Grimm states that the document proving an artist did *not* employ a workshop should have to be found as proof for the unusual case of working alone, not the other way around. See: Grimm 1993, p. 634.

78 For an contemporary account of such an approach, see: De Piles 1677, p. 5–7.

79 See: Tummers 2008.

80 Provided that assistants completed only less important passages of a painting, one could still indulge in looking for characteristic brushstrokes, as long as one steered clear of the subsidiary parts. To a certain degree, it may be expected that the most difficult passages were indeed completed by the master himself, but unfortunately this cannot fully be relied on. See: Tummers 2008, p. 49ff.

stylistic instructions.[81] Stylistic conformity with the master's style was certainly a prerequisite for working in Rubens's workshop, with a letter from Rubens to Annibale Chieppo – Minister to the Duke of Mantua – plainly revealing Rubens's attitude towards the stylistic characteristics of his helpers.[82] When passing through Valladolid on a diplomatic mission to Spain, Rubens received a commission, which he was to complete as quickly as possible with the help of local painters. Rubens exasperatedly describes his assigned helpers as incompetent and careless, and he plainly complains about their lack of stylistic concordance. It becomes clear from this letter that during his travels to Italy, Rubens was already accustomed to assistance at this early point in his career. He also considered it essential to ensure that his assistants' style was similar to his own. It is most likely that these same preferences influenced his choice in staff when setting up his workshop in Antwerp a couple of years later. The participation of assistants can consequently not be seen as an individual contribution and looking to attribute paintings within a workshop is technically not compliant with a historically accurate understanding of an assistant's role.

In addition to stylistic compliance, it is necessary to take into account a considerably multi-facetted collaboration: paintings, and even small sections within one painting, cannot simply be categorised into being either autograph or a product of the workshop. Defining a pupil or colleague's involvement is much rather a matter of proportion than a choice between two mutually-exclusive alternatives. An oil painting is built up in a vast number of layers and the contribution of assistants must be seen as super- as well as juxtaposed. Put simply, it is not only a question of who completed the head of a figure and who painted the folds of garment, but also a matter of who applied the base coat versus who added the finishing touches. Of course, proficiency played a role and most likely not every assistant was capable of imitating his master convincingly on the whole. However, it can be reasonably assumed that ideally tasks were assigned according to expertise. After all, vouching for a satisfying result by means of expertise and supervision was a master's key selling argument. Every painting that left a studio *should* demonstrate the respective master's style and craftsmanship, irrespective of who contributed.[83] In reality, there are visible fluctuations in the performance of most well-known artists, and it is very likely that

81 This deference to stylistic conformity is documented by a Utrecht guild regulation from 1641, which prohibited the staff members of a studio to paint in any style but their master's. Wetering 1993, p. 628.

82 For the complete letter see: Magurn 1955, p. 33.

83 This is consistent with contemporary accounts such as the description of Van Dyck's studio practice given by Everhard Jabach, which indicates that the master maintained all responsibilities irrespective of who additionally contributed to an artwork. De Piles 1969, p. 291ff.

assistants were responsible for many of them.[84] However, it remains to be emphasised that these fluctuations were most probably undesired and involuntary and did not occur in every painting. Most importantly, a thoroughly satisfying result cannot automatically be associated with a lack of assistance.

These collaborative working methods raise the issue of how 17th-century patrons felt about the contribution of pupils. Answering questions in this context satisfactorily is particularly difficult when keeping in mind what the historian Reinhart Koselleck called the "*veto power of sources*", namely the notion that sources can only give reliable information about what *cannot* be said about past events.[85] In other words, sources of any nature should never serve as the basis for interpretations. Eddy de Jongh says quite plainly that "*a general fixation on authenticity, such as we have known for years definitely did not exist*".[86] Max J. Friedländer was of a similar opinion, stating that autonomous execution was not taken for granted by contemporary patrons.[87] By contrast, some scholars like to see our modern fixation on single-handed execution legitimised by the tastes of 17th-century connoisseurs who supposedly shared these same preferences. Contemporary preferences of this sort would naturally invalidate the accusation that the search for a master's autograph core œuvre is an anachronistic endeavour. Ernst van de Wetering of the Rembrandt Research Project addressed the issue in a lecture in the following, unambiguous terms: "[without contemporary regard for a master's single-handed execution] *the idea* [...] *that there is a need to isolate works of Rembrandt's hand from that of his pupils and assistants, would be a complete anachronism, a wrongly applied projection of the 19th-century cult of genius to everyday 17th-century workshop practice*".[88] In the sixth and final volume of *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, Van de Wetering addresses the issue of autograph paintings and their contemporary evaluation by referring to Jaap van der Veen's essay on the subject, which was published in the fourth volume

84 In this regard, Roger de Piles sought to defend Rubens's honour by making his assistants responsible for any lack of quality. De Piles describes his issues in the following words: "*La réputation de Rubens s'étant étendue par toute l'Europe, il n'y eut pas un Peintre qui ne voulut avoir un morceau de sa main; et comme il était extrêmement sollicité de toutes parts, il fit faire sur ses Desseins coloriez, et par d'habiles Disciples un grand nombre de Tableaux, qu'il retouchait ensuite avec des yeux frais, avec une intelligence vive, & avec une promptitude de main qui y répandait entièrement son esprit, ce qui luy acquit beaucoup de biens en peu de tems: mais la différence de ces sortes de Tableaux, qui passaient pour être de luy, d'avec ceux qui étaient véritablement de sa main, fit du tort à sa réputation; car ils étaient la plupart mal dessinez, et légèrement peints*". See: Teyssèdre 1958, p. 134.

85 See: Koselleck 1995, p. 153. For a discussion of Koselleck's principle regarding Rubens's biography, see: Büttner 2015, p. 10.

86 See: De Jongh 1990, p. 2–3.

87 Friedländer 1942, p. 168.

88 Wetering 1993, p. 627–628.

of the series.[89] Van der Veen assumes that while single-handed execution primarily concerned the very high end of the art market, it was indeed a major concern during the 17th century. To support this assertion, he cites numerous documents that – in his opinion – allude to the appreciation of single-handed execution.[90] His reasoning is postulated in particular on his interpretation of the term *original*, which he defines as "*a work made by the hand of a certain master*".[91] Van der Veen thus attaches an additional meaning to the word, interpreting it as more informative than the term *principaal*, which is best described as the first version of a subject, the exact opposite of a copy.[92] He supports this hypothesis with a quote from Franciscus Junius's *Schilder Boeck* in which Junius describes the term *original* in the following words: "*most are wont to prove their knowledge of art by being able to immediately distinguish originals from copies. The works that the excellent masters themselves have made after life, are here referred to as original pieces*".[93] However, it is difficult to deduce a precise interpretation of the term from this text passage. "*Original*" may well solely refer to the initial version of a subject, without necessarily presupposing single-handed execution. In accordance with Anna Tummers and Jan Sluijter, the two terms *principaal* and *original* can be seen as synonymous and the notion that the term *original* offers additional information about a painting's authorship should be neglected.[94]

89 The final volume was published in 2014 with the subheading "A Complete Survey". Van de Wetering writes: "*What led to Van der Veen's research [...] was the increasingly urgent question of whether the goal of the RRP – the compilation of a canon of Rembrandt's autograph paintings – was not perhaps in the end anachronistic. [...] On the basis of numerous 17th-century sources Van der Veen established that art-lovers in that period in fact attached as much significance to the authenticity of works from the master of a workshop as we do today*". Van de Wetering 2015, p. 51–52.

90 For instance, Van der Veen mentions cases such as that of the painter Bartolomeus van der Helst, who was asked if he alone had worked on a painting in question, after having already attested to the fact that the painting was a *principaal*. Van der Veen interprets this as a repeated inquiry and a testament to the fact that single-handed execution was valued highly. At the same time, one could also argue that this case shows that the term *principaal* only alluded to the fact that the painting in question showed the first version of a composition. Accordingly, the description did not yet offer information concerning the execution of the work, thus warranting the second question. See: Van der Veen 2005, p. 9; and the following footnote below.

91 See: Van der Veen 2005, p. 4.

92 There are numerous different interpretations for these two frequently-cited terms. For instance, similar to Van der Veen's interpretation of *original*, Frits Lugt interpreted the meaning of *principaal* as "*original by the master concerned*" in his article on Italian painting published in 1936. See: Van der Veen 2005, p. 3.

93 Van der Veen additionally cites the Dutch translation of the "De pictura veterum libri tres", published in Amsterdam in 1637: "[...] *plagten de meeste kracht haerer Konst-kennisse daer in voornaemelick te bewijsen, datse d'originelen staends-voets van de copijen weten t'onderscheyden. d'Oorspronckelicke wercken die de treffelicke Meesters nae 't leven selver ghemaeckt hebben, worden alhier door den name van originele stucken te verstaen ghegeven*". Van der Veen 2005, p. 4 (footnote 7).

94 See: Tummers 2009, p. 94.

Although it seems highly likely that a master primarily committed himself to the initial version of a subject (and left the less demanding copying activity to his pupils), it cannot be presumed that all first versions were one hundred per cent single-handedly completed. Consequently, when documents attest to preferences towards the *original* or *principaal* version of a subject, they were not necessarily triggered by a desire for single-handed execution. However, the fact remains that *original* works were more valuable.[95] If it was not the single-handed-execution aspect of a painting that made it more desirable, which key aspect added value? It could be argued that until the 19th century a painting was primarily the product of craftsmanship, as well as costly material. Therefore, art was sold like any other commodity and prices were primarily determined by hourly rates.[96] Coming up with new compositions undoubtedly took a certain amount of time, which in turn was saved when making copies, which could consequently explain the lower price.[97] In other words, the difference in price would lie in the monetary compensation for additional effort rendered. However, this leaves open the question of the first version's sales argument. If there had been no consumer preference, surely the additional costs would have been evenly divided between all versions of a subject, leaving all paintings equally expensive. For first versions to be saleable at higher prices, they must have had a key selling point valued by collectors. Neil de Marchi and Hans van Migroet argue that it was the remuneration for *inventio* that added monetary value to the *original*.[98] The Latin term *inventio* was used from the 16th century onwards to define the process of designing a work of art and is derived from classical rhetoric. On the other hand, art theoretical texts such as the previously-quoted treatise on the painting of the ancients by Franciscus Junius show a different understanding, underlining the regard for *imitatio*. In his treatise, Junius exemplifies that the distinction between original works and their copies dates

95 De Marchi and Van Migroet have done extensive research on the price difference between originals and copies. See: De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1996; De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1994. In Rubens's case, a list of paintings Rubens himself sent to Sir Dudley Carleton offers insights into his pricing policy. See: Magurn 1955, p. 60–61. It should be noted that compared to today's standards, the difference in price was marginal. Generally copies were in high demand; for instance, from the end of the 16th century onwards, paintings by "old masters" ("older" from the viewpoint of the 16th century viewer) were copied for the growing market, a practice in which Rubens also participated. See: Büttner 2006, p. 117.

96 Nils Büttner makes reference to Adriaen van der Werff, who kept meticulous records and who charged 25 Guilders a day. See: Büttner 2006, p. 114. In addition to the cost of labour, expensive materials such as wood panels and pigments influenced the price.

97 A deposition from 1621 relating to a bet attests pointedly to the "quality aspect" of assessing art: The portrait painter Hubert Grimani boasted he could make a copy of a painting that would surpass the original. As Montias highlights, *"it did not matter so much who painted the original and whether his idea or conception had been imitated or purloined; what really mattered was whether an artist had the craft and skill to do a 'better job'."* Montias 1982, p. 235.

98 See: De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1996.

back to antiquity and that the imitation of nature as the highest goal of art production caused this distinction, whereby every copy of a work of art can only be inferior since it is no longer modelled directly after nature.[99]

One further aspect that might have played a role in securing the high regard for *principaal* work is quality. It has already been highlighted that the involvement of assistants should never be categorically ruled out, not even for the first versions of a subject. On the other hand, copies present a situation that is slightly easier to assess: although not all *principaal* versions of a subject were necessarily entirely completed by the master himself, making copies in turn was typically solely the assistants' job.[100] In terms of a painting's quality, this means that *if* a workshop produced a painting of lesser quality, it was more likely to be a copy than a *principaal*. After all, paintings are very difficult to identically reproduce. A significant example in this context is an exchange of letters concerning a barter trade between an English minister Sir Dudley Carleton and Rubens from 1618. Sir Carleton was looking to trade a collection of antiques for several paintings, and he specifically requested the paintings to be by Rubens's hand.[101] Nonetheless, Rubens also included paintings executed by his pupils in a list, which Carleton initially rejected. After Rubens had guaranteed that all works were of great quality – including the ones begun by pupils – Carleton relented.[102] This telling correspondence will be discussed in further detail in a following chapter, although at this point it serves to show that for Carleton the motive for preferring an original was in fact a way of ensuring that he would receive the best quality possible. In conclusion, it can be said that contrary to general concerns regarding a painting's quality, the appreciation of authorship in our modern sense concerned with the intrinsic value of a specific individual's contribution is not detectable during the 17th century.

99 For excerpts of Junius's treatise in original language and further considerations, see: Büttner 2006, p. 115.

100 See for instance: De Marchi/Van Miegroet 1996, p. 34.

101 Magurn 1955, p. 59.

102 Rubens writes: "*Your Excellency has taken only the originals, with which I am perfectly satisfied. Yet Your Excellency must not think that the others are mere copies, for they are so well retouched by my hand that they are hardly to be distinguished from originals. Nevertheless, they are rated at a much lower price*". Magurn 1955, p. 61–62.

4. Rubens's Studio

4.1 The Return to Antwerp – Setting up a Business

Peter Paul Rubens was born in 1577 in Siegen, Germany. His parents Jan Rubens and Maria Pypelincks – both respected citizens of Antwerp – had fled the city in 1568.[103] Jan Rubens belonged to the Calvinistic faith and when Rubens's father died in 1587, his Catholic mother moved back to her hometown with her children. Due to the political unrest, Antwerp had undergone a substantial decline since Maria Pypelincks had left with her husband almost twenty years earlier and she must have found the city radically changed. When Antwerp fell to the troops of Philipp II in 1585, the population decreased by nearly fifty per cent and the blockage of the River Scheldt prevented the trade that was so vital to the city's economy.[104] However, in this context it is important to note that a large percentage of artists were catholic and consequently this particular professional group were less affected than some others.[105]

As a boy, Peter Paul Rubens attended a highly prestigious Latin school and served as page at the court of Marguerite de Ligne before commencing his artistic apprenticeship with Tobias Verhaecht, Adam van Noort and Otto van Veen. Rubens finished his training in 1598, and from the very outset of his career as a painter, he relied on assistance.[106] When he left Antwerp for Italy in 1600, he was accompanied by Deodatus van der Mont, a pupil five years his junior.[107] Van der Mont became a master in 1608, which shows that his employment with Rubens must have comprised artistic

103 In 1566, Antwerp had already experienced the first waves of emigration that threatened the city's economy. On the development of the city during Margaret of Parma's rule as general governor, see: Soen 2016.

104 The population decreased from 80,000 in 1584 to 48,400 in 1586. Kirby 1999, p. 5. When Alessandro Farnese decided to besiege the city, as a result the prices of grain skyrocketed and wages were essentially reduced to nothing. People who had the means left the city, although for most others travel documents were not permitted. Surveys undertaken during the course of the siege enable drawing conclusions concerning the population's finances and their level of supply. For an analysis of the town's situation with special consideration of the residing artists' circumstances – which were comparatively better off than most other occupational groups – see: Büttner 2016.

105 For a comprehensive study on the subject of painting in Antwerp during and after the disasters of the late-16th century, see: Leuschner 2015; and Büttner, cited in footnote above.

106 Rubens was accepted into the Guild of Saint Luke in Antwerp on 18th October 1598. Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 401.

107 In 1628, Rubens signed a statutory declaration, confirming that Deodatus van der Mont accompanied him on his travels to Italy and Spain between 1600 and 1608 (See: Rooses/Ruelens 1887, P. 256.). A contract between Rubens and Members of the Oratory congregation further confirms Van der Mont's presence in Italy, as he acted as a witness. Jaffé 1977, p. 93.

training. His status was likely that of a *gezel*, a reasonably experienced assistant yet to receive the level of master.[108] In times of high demand, when the help of his one assistant would not suffice, Rubens would hire additional help. This becomes apparent in a previously-mentioned letter that Rubens wrote to Annibale Chieppo – Minister to the Duke of Mantua – concerning a commission that he had received while on a trip to Spain. Rubens complains about his Spanish assistants' lack of competence and insufficient stylistic conformity.[109] Rubens's stay in Italy ended abruptly when he received news of his mother's illness and left for Antwerp instantaneously.[110] However, when Rubens arrived in Antwerp, his mother had already passed. Initially, he had probably planned to return to Italy, having at least said as much in a letter to Annibale Chieppo. Nonetheless, Rubens prolonged his stay (most likely to attend his brother's wedding ceremony) and when he received the offer to become court painter for Isabella Clara Eugenia and Albert VII of Austria – Governors of the Habsburg Netherlands – he accepted and decided to stay for good.[111] Customarily, the court painter was committed to reside close at hand, in Brussels. However, Rubens was granted the exceptional liberty of working from his hometown.[112] Along with this position also came the rare privilege of being exempted from the requirement of registering pupils to the Guild of Saint Luke, as was customarily every member's duty.[113] Rubens's employee Jacques Moermans represents an exception, as he was registered as Rubens's disciple between 1621 and 1622.[114] The motifs behind this distinction remain unknown. Rubens's name only appears in the guild's books in two further instances: when Justus van Egmont and Willem Panneels were accepted into the Guild of Saint Luke as masters during the accounting year of 1627/1628, it was recorded that they had previously trained in Rubens's studio.[115] As tempting as the thought of guild records concerning Rubens's

108 Van der Mont was almost 18 years old when he left for Italy, which strongly suggests that he began his training a few years earlier as was the norm. On 16th-century workshop practices and employment contracts, see: Helmus 2006, p. 201–210.

109 See: Magurn 1955, p. 33.

110 The news reached Rubens in Rome, where he had just finished an altarpiece for Santa Maria in Vallicella, the principal Church of the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri. See: Magurn 1955, p. 23.

111 Rubens had left Italy in October 1608 and by April of the following year he had already received the offer from the governors. Magurn 1955, p. 45–53.

112 See for instance: Büttner 2006, p. 46.

113 This is documented by a notification to the magistrate of Antwerp confirming Rubens's employment at court and his exemption from taxes and guild regulations. The document is dated 10th January 1610 and kept in the *Archives Générales du Royaume* in Brussels.

114 See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 574.

115 See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 649–650.

teaching activity may be, even if they *did* exist, it is unlikely that they would be able to answer all questions regarding the total size of Rubens's studio.[116] As previously mentioned, pupils were not the only members of a workshop and Rubens most likely employed a larger number of painters who had already received some years of training. In general, a distinction can be made between *apprentices* who received their initial training in Rubens's studio and *journeymen* or *gezellen*, who had completed their training and worked in the studio as hired help. When names are mentioned in connection with Rubens's workshop, it is not always easy to clearly differentiate between the two groups. Contemporary authors seem to have considered many of them as Rubens's "disciples" in the broadest sense of the word, not necessarily making the distinction between pupil and employee. It seems that Rubens himself did not particularly apply a distinction: he presumably still referred to Anthonis van Dyck as his "*discepolo*" in 1618, when Van Dyck had already become a master of the Guild of Saint Luke and was working as a free master.[117] Based on these facts, it should be presumed that the exact number of painters that Rubens employed throughout his career and their identities will most likely never be ascertained.[118] Although this lack of concrete information renders studying Rubens's workshop practices more difficult, some information can be deduced from written sources, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Less than six months after accepting the position as court painter, Rubens married Isabella Brant, daughter of one of Antwerp's most influential families.[119] Initially the couple moved in with Isabella's father to *Kloosterstraat*, in a property sufficiently large to accommodate a workshop. The house must have disposed of a fairly spacious work area, as monumental paintings such as the "*The Descent from the Cross*" for the Confraternity of the Harquebusiers were completed in the premises. This can be verified by documents concerning the transportation of the main and side panels in September 1612 and March 1614, respectively.[120]

116 For an in-depth study on the subject of which pupils and employees can be associated with Rubens's studio, see: Balis 2007.

117 See: Magurn 1955, p. 61/Appendix 7. In the letter, Rubens writes about the best of his pupils, which is commonly thought to have been Van Dyck, who worked in Rubens's studio from 1617 to 1620. However, theoretically he could be referring to a different person entirely.

118 Hans Vlieghe dedicated a lot of research to identifying Rubens's employees. See: Vlieghe 1993. See also footnote 116.

119 Isabella's father Jan Brant was a high city official and a close friend to both Peter Paul Rubens and his brother Philip. Philip Rubens was married to Maria de Moy, Isabella's Aunt. These family constellations show how Antwerp's elite preferred to stay among its social class. See: Büttner 2006 p. 43.

120 See: Nieuwenhuizen 1962, p. 32–33.

The painted surface of the central panel of the altarpiece measures no less than 417 × 307 cm and had to be transported "*from the attic to the ground floor of the House of P. P. Rubens and from that same house to the to the chapel*", as can be deduced from the Harquebusiers Account Book.[121]

In 1610, Rubens bought a stately property on the Wapper, which disposed of a large garden and sufficient space to build a studio, according to his exact wishes. The exact date of Rubens's relocation to his new home cannot be established, although documents show that work on the house was still in progress in 1616.[122] The extension to the house comprised a 150 square metre workroom on the ground floor, two additional rooms for paining and a study.[123] According to guild regulations, it was not uncommon for masters to provide lodging for their pupils.[124] Perhaps Rubens accommodated his students directly on his property on the Wapper.[125] The estate would certainly have provided sufficient room, especially since over the years Rubens had significantly expanded by buying the neighbouring houses and properties.[126]

4.2. A Multi-Person Business? Selected Literary Sources on Rubens's Studio Practices

Rubens's studio practices are by no means well documented. The painter himself left no testimony, and throughout the years various theories around the creation of his artworks have emerged. However, certain pieces of evidence offer insights to some extent. The most telling of these sources regarding Rubens's workshop practice will be discussed in the following.

Parts of Rubens's extensive correspondence have been preserved and in some letters pieces of information can be deduced.[127] For instance, in one of his often-quoted letters to the engraver Jacob de Bie, Rubens apologises for not being able to take on the young man who Jacob de Bie had evidently previously recommended, as his workshop was – in his own words – completely

121 Own translation based on: Büttner 2015, p. 81.

122 See: Cat.-Braunschweig 2004, p. 16

123 The premises are open to the public.

124 On early Netherlandish workshops, see: Campbell 1981, p. 44.

125 Anthonis van Dyck – who admittedly played a special role among Rubens's pupils – was accommodated on Rubens's property between 1618 and 1620. See for instance: Hartwieg 2018, p. 275.

126 Three of the adjacent houses stood in the axis of his main house, while three more stood on the southern border of the property. Rubens himself used one of the three houses on the south border: in 1639, books and paintings were brought to one of the houses to set up a library. See: Büttner 2015, p. 94; Büttner 2006, p. 89. On the housing situation of Rubens's domestic staff, see: Watteeuw 2015.

127 For reprints of Rubens's correspondence, see: Magurn 1955; Rooses/ Ruelens 1887.

overstaffed and he already had to turn down over one hundred applicants.[128] However, pieces of information taken from Rubens's letters have to be evaluated cautiously as there is no way of knowing whether everything that he wrote exactly corresponded to the truth. For instance, Rubens could have been exaggerating regarding the demand for a training space in his studio to be polite in turning down de Bie's candidate. Nonetheless, the letter reveals for certain that in 1611 Rubens's studio was up and running and that he had hired staff.

In 1621, an eyewitness account was compiled by Otto Sperling, describing the working methods in Rubens's studio. Sperling – a young student of medicine – visited Rubens's mansion while passing through Antwerp on his travels and documented his experiences in his diary:[129]

> "*We also visited the famous and ingenious painter Rubens, whom we met whilst he was at work, whereby he simultaneously had Tacitus read to him, alongside dictating a letter. When we remained quiet, as not to disturb him, he himself began talking to us, while proceeding with his work, still having read out loud to him, not stopping the dictating of the letter and answering our questions, hereby purposefully showing us his great ingenuity. Next he had a servant take us all around his wonderful palace and show us his antiquities and Greek and Roman statues which he had in large quantity. We also saw there a large hall which had no windows, but instead the light came from above from a big opening in the middle of the hall. In this hall sat many young painters who were all working on different pieces which Mr Rubens had previously sketched for them with chalk and on which he had added a blotch of colour here and there. These paintings the young associates had to work up fully in colour until finally Mr Rubens himself perfected everything used brushstrokes and colour to finish everything off.*

128 Rubens writes: "*From all sides applications reach me. Some young men remain here for several years with other masters, awaiting a vacancy in my studio. Among others, my friend and (as you know) patron, M. Rockox, has only with great difficulty obtained a place for a youth whom he himself brought up, and whom, in the meantime, he was having trained by others. I can tell you truly, without any exaggeration, that I have had to refuse over one hundred, even some of my own relatives or my wife's, and not without causing great displeasure among many of my best friends.*" in a letter dated 11th May 1611. See: Magurn 1955, p. 55.

129 Otto Sperling later became the private physician of the Danish and Norwegian king Christian IV and his journal was published in 1885 by the Danish librarian and literary historian Sophus Birket-Smith. See: Büttner 2006, p. 93.

Thus it was all called Rubens's work, through which the man accumulated an enormous fortune and kings and princes showered him with gifts and jewels. [...] *When we had seen all we returned to him, thanked him courteously and said farewell."*[130]

Otto Sperling

Sperling describes Rubens as an ingenious human being and artist. Despite the fact that the account can perhaps be classified as exaggerated concerning Rubens's conduct, there is no reason to believe that Sperling's statement regarding the workshop employees is entirely false, especially since other documents convey a similar picture: Joachim von Sandrart – who published his main work *Teutsche Academie* between 1675 and 1680 – emphasises what a great service Rubens did Antwerp's youth by turning the city into a school for the arts. He writes that Rubens relied on young helpers and that some young artists reached noticeable perfection thanks to their work in Rubens's studio. In this context, Sandrart mentions Anthonis van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens and Jan van den Hoecke.[131] His description is in line with Sperling's insofar as that Sandrart also emphasises that Rubens would add the finishing touches to the works prepared by his employees or pupils.

An exchange of letters between Rubens and the English minister Sir Dudley Carleton in 1618 offers an outstanding insight not only into Rubens's working methods, but also his selling policy.[132] Sir Carleton was looking to trade a collection of antiques for several paintings and therefore Rubens sent a list of available works. A painter's studio generally accommodated a multitude of finished and unfinished paintings, due to the long drying phases associated with oil paint. In the interests of efficiency, it was custom practice to simultaneously work on several pieces. The list that Rubens provided Carleton includes the scale, prices and – most importantly – details on the

130 Most of the above-cited English translation of the text was quoted from a publication by Nils Büttner (see: Büttner 2017, p. 42). The author translated the text passages that were not cited in the aforementioned publication herself. For a citation of the original text, see: Büttner 2017, p. 51. The original document is currently kept in Copenhagen, in *Det kongelige Bibliotek* (Gl. kgl. Samling 3094, 4°, p. 28f).

131 Sandrart describes Rubens's workshop in the following words (loosely translated): "*To accelerate the production of such great works he relied on the help of many young people, diligently training them, each according to his best inclination and capacity. They copied him and significantly helped, as they usually did all the animals, birds, fish, landscapes, trees, brooks, grass, air, water and forests. So he* [Rubens] *made the invention himself on a model, about 2 or 3 spans high, and after this he had his students* [orig: "Discipel"] *Anthonis van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens, von Huck or others, paint on the big cloth, which he would retouch or paint important sections himself. With this he gained a great advantage for himself, but also did the youth a great service, as they were trained in all parts of the art, and the city of Antwerp by his industriousness became a tremendous art school, in which the apprentices rose to noticeable perfection*". For the original text in German, see: Peltzer 1925, p. 157.

132 For a copy of the letter, see: Magurn 1955, p. 59–68.

manufacturing process of the paintings in question.[133] Rubens proves to be very open concerning the contribution of his students and specifically cites the contribution of his colleagues, such as Frans Snyders – an expert on landscapes – as well as his disciples' involvement. He emphasises the fact that by adding the finishing retouches to every painting, his pupils' involvement would no longer be visible. This is an important detail as it highlights the way in which his pupils (or employees) were regarded. With the exception of specialist colleagues such as Frans Snyders, another artist's work was by no means seen as an individual contribution to his paintings. To the contrary, the only goal was to create stylistic conformity, namely in the style of the master himself. In light of this, it seems futile for scholars and connoisseurs to search for telling details that might reveal another artist's involvement. Of course, in some cases the goal of creating stylistically corresponding paintings was not met, and it is often very weak passages that betray the involvement of a less apt painter. However, it cannot be proven without doubt that those paintings that do not show these telling areas are Rubens's own work rather than testaments of him achieving his objective.

Carleton had initially set his mind on autograph paintings, but after much persuasion on Rubens's part (including keen assurances concerning the quality and value) he accepted three works predominantly carried out by assistants. The significant information that we can draw from this written conversation is that in 1618 a large fraction of the paintings stored in Rubens's studio was realised with the help of his staff.[134]

Although these reports lack specific details concerning the number of employees or information concerning the pupils' identities, it may well be suspected that Rubens employed a large number of helpers.[135] When taking Rubens's lifestyle into consideration, this hardly comes as a surprise. Beside his profession, Rubens fulfilled a multitude of obligations and interests. When discussing Rubens's lifestyle and persona, it must be taken into account that reports on this subject are more often than not strongly influenced by the author's personal agenda. However, Rubens's personal correspondence prompts the assumption that he had a keen personal interest in antiques, archaeology, architecture, scientific inventions, mathematics and

133 Rubens lists twelve paintings, of which only five were completed entirely by him. Magurn 1955, p. 60–61.

134 This is in line with Rubens's estate inventory of 1640, which lists several copies after his own compositions done by members of the workshop. On the subject of Rubens's collection containing copies by other artists, see footnote no. 280. For a study on Rubens's private collection, see: Muller 1989, p. 145.

135 This should be taken into account when regarding the ratio between autographic paintings versus paintings completed with the help of assistants. An essay by Arnout Balis (already previously cited above) on the identities of Rubens's pupils should find mention in this context. See: Balis 2007, p. 30–51.

philosophy, possessing profound knowledge in many of these fields.[136] Besides these personal occupations, Rubens was verifiably engaged in numerous diplomatic duties. This involved extensive correspondence with English, Spanish and French diplomats and political missions, which took him away for months on end.[137] Consequently, Rubens was unable to fully devote himself to painting, his "*dolcissima professione*".[138] Aside from that, even if Rubens had devoted all of his time and effort towards painting, it is highly questionable whether a single person (or a few persons for that matter) could have produced the large number of paintings.[139] All of these aspects point towards the fact that a well-functioning workshop was indispensable in the production of Rubens's works.

4.3. The Preparatory Process in Rubens's Studio

If it is undisputed that Rubens employed a number of assistants and pupils throughout his lifetime, not much research has been dedicated to the question of how these multiple hands worked together on a daily basis.[140] It is essential to note that the following chapters were drawn up in an attempt to categorise the material, which is not to say they represented individual artistic genres during the 17th century. The categories were formed in respect of the work's material and its intended use, and they should not be seen as a rigid segmentation since the borders are frequently blurred. As with the previous chapters, the aim was to provide a foundation for the subsequent case study and provide the reader an overview of the basis of discussion.

It is important to underline that regardless of their value, none of these preparatory works were considered artworks in their own right. Due to their great quality, Rubens's drawings and oil sketches can be admired as masterpieces, yet they were not created as individual artworks.

136 Rubens corresponded with distinguished scholars all over Europe. For instance, he reveals a keen interest in physics and the construction of a perpetual motion apparatus in letters to Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc and discusses antique gems and epigraphs with the historian Frans Swert. See: Magurn 1955, p. 90ff; Magurn 1955, p. 58ff.

137 Rubens himself once referred to his busy lifestyle as constantly having his leg in a stirrup. See: Magurn 1955, p. 116.

138 Rubens himself referred to his profession as his "*dolcissima professione*". See: Magurn 1955, p. I.

139 Leo van Puyvelde argued that Rubens possessed outstanding speed and could have finished a work in one or two days. See: Van Puyvelde 1952, p. 212. However, this seems utterly impossible when considering the size and content of Rubens's works.

140 For instance, the catalogue edited by Professor Toshiharu Nakamura titled "*Rubens and His Workshop: the Flight of Lot and His Family from Sodom*" for an exhibition held at the *Modern Museum of Western Art* in Tokio takes an almost solitary stand. See: Cat.-Tokyo 1993.

The crucial factor is intention, and preparatory material exists only as a function of the finished artwork. Drawings and oil sketches come in a multitude of different forms, which offers insights to some degree, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

4.3.1. Drawings

Numerous of Rubens's drawings have been preserved and most of them can be considered the starting point in the process of creating a painting, although not all were created with the same purpose in mind. Drawings represent a network of functions. Among other things, they can be part of a personal creative development, illustrate and aid the progression of thoughts, represent a form of inspiration (in terms of a collection of different shapes and figures), embody a teaching tool and serve the communication between the members of a studio. As will be shown, most of Rubens's drawings probably served more than one purpose at once.[141]

Rubens kept his drawings in a place that he called the *cantoor* – which literally means crafts room – and he made use of them whenever he needed. He definitely valued this accumulation of motifs very strongly as he considered them specifically in his will. After his passing, the drawings were not to be sold until all of his sons – or future sons-in-law – had definitely decided against a career in painting. In light of how highly Rubens clearly valued his designs, it is surprising that a large number of these drawings from the *cantoor* were copied. The *Statens Museum for Kunst* in Copenhagen houses a collection of around 460 drawings, whose authorship is not fully established and whose existence gave rise to a number of questions concerning their execution. The drawings were first associated with Rubens's pupil Willem Panneels by Gustav Falck in 1918.[142] Falck based this attribution on stylistic similarities between the drawings and Panneel's graphic work. Some scholars suspect that the drawings were copied under dubious circumstances, during Rubens's absence during 1628–1630, and without his consent. Jan Garff and Eva de la Fuente Pedersen – who catalogued the large part of the collection in 1988 – support this theory, as does Arnout Balis.[143] This view is opposed by Nora de Poorter, who argues that some drawings (such as the designs for the *Eucharist-Series*) could not have been made during the period of Rubens's absence, as the originals

141 On the subject of drawings being used in Rubens's studio for novices to learn to draw, see: Logan 2006.

142 See: Poorter 1978, p. 230.

143 See: Garff/de la Fuente Pedersen 1988; Balis 1993; Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 17.

were no longer located in Rubens's workshop at that point.[144] It is certainly possible that Panneels completed most of his copies during Rubens's absence. However, it is not convincing that he did so without Rubens's knowledge. Making copies for educational purposes was common practice in 17th-century workshops and for obvious economic reasons drawings were an ideal medium.[145] Numerous examples attest to the fact that Rubens's employees copied his compositions and these copies could only have been made behind the back of a very negligent studio master. With Rubens, the opposite was the case, as can be deduced from a letter that Rubens sent to his assistant Lukas. Rubens wrote from his country estate with the request that Lukas should check whether all drawings and designs were stowed and locked up in due form.[146] However, a letter to Pierre Dupuy from 1628 suggests that Rubens's collection of drawings was not arranged in a very orderly manner. The French archivist had requested information on the *Medici* cycle's image content and Rubens answered that he had not yet found the notes in his papers, but had high hopes of finding them soon.[147] Of course, this could always have been a polite way of stalling for more time and it is not entirely clear whether Rubens in fact hints at certain "chaos" within his collection of sketches and drawings or merely his written documents. Moreover, even if Rubens did not have his collection of works in perfect order, this would not necessarily presuppose that his "chaos" was open to the workshop staff. It could have been a mess behind locked doors. In any case, the letter to his assistant Lukas shows that Rubens was meticulous about the storing away of his designs and it seems unlikely that he would have left them in the open when leaving Antwerp for two years. Willem Panneels looked after Rubens's studio during his absence, which is

144 Poorter 1978, p. 230.

145 In this context, a theory on Rubens's so-called "*Drawing-Book*" is worth mentioning: the "*Drawing-Book*" comprises a title page by Paulus Pontius and twenty loose engravings, which were published after Rubens's death by Alexander Voet. Voet probably had the originals in his possession. Paul Huvenne suggested that the book was published with the intention of preserving and continuing Rubens's studio tradition (see: Cat.-Antwerp 1993). As Anne-Marie Logan highlights, this indicates Rubens would have had pupils practice to draw the different parts of the body by copying drawn examples. See: Logan 2006, p. 256–257.

146 Rubens writes: *"Take good care, when you leave, that everything is well locked up, and that no originals remain upstairs in the studio, or any sketches"*. Magurn 1955, p. 411.

147 For the full letter – sent on 25th February 1628 – see: Magurn 1955, p. 239–240.

proven by a declaration on oath.[148] Perhaps the permission to make copies from Rubens's highly-valued sketchbook was part of their mutual agreement. It was not unusual that artists collected drawings for creative purposes, although art collectors showing interest was a phenomenon that only established itself further during the course of the 17th century.[149] Few collectors acquired drawings and sketches from Rubens's collection during his lifetime and when they did, it was primarily drawings by Italian artists that Rubens had previously acquired and merely reworked. At this point in time, drawings by famous Italian artists were categorically preferred. For instance, the Bishop of Gent – Antoine Triest – acquired drawings by Titian that Rubens had reworked.[150]

When Rubens's *cantoor* sketches were sold in 1657, after his youngest daughter – Constantia Albertina – had joined a convent, the collection was almost intact. At the auction, the majority of drawings went to Johannes Philippus Happeart, an art dealer and canon of the Cathedral of Our Lady, who in turn sold parts of the collection to Henry Lankrink and Everhard Jabach.[151] Jabach sold most of his drawings to Louis XIV of France in 1671, and these drawings can be found in the collection of the *Louvre* today.[152] The remaining sketches that were not sold at the auction in 1657

148 On 1st June 1630, Rubens signed an affidavit for the benefit of Panneels, who was planning to travel to Prussia. The document states the following (own translation): "*We announce and testify through the individuals present at the date cited below, that before us the great man Peter Paul Ruebens, the noble servant of our serene highness* […] *appeared in person to take an oath before us, at his request, to appraise the young Wilhelm Panneels, 30 years of age* […] *He reported, claimed and testified that the same Wilhelm Panneels learned the art of painting for five and a half years and made his test piece proficiently and honestly, and when dedicating himself to the same art he did not make little progress; in particular he reaffirmed, when the said guarantor went to Spain on public business of our catholic majesty, and to England, he left the same Wilhelm in charge of his property and his facilities, for him to guard and the previously mentioned Wilhelm carried out these tasks with the utmost reliability, and when he returned to his homeland, he presented a faultless report of his activities.*" For the whole written declaration in Latin, see: Génard 1882, p. 222.

149 During the 15th century, it was primarily artists who valued and collected drawings for their use in creative processes. Unparalleled in its influence on artists' collections was Giorgio Vasari's renowned "*Libro de' disegni*", a large collection of drawings that featured Vasari's own sketches along with drawings by his contemporaries and predecessors. During the 16th century, non-professionals such as the Florentine humanist Vincenzo Borghini increasingly began to include drawings in their collections. The same applies to courtly collections. For instance, at the close of the 16th century, the ducal *Kunstkammer* in Munich already housed an inherent collection of drawings. However, it was only during the 17th century that collecting drawings underwent a surge in popularity across the board. For a brief overview of the history of drawings in public collections, see: Cat.-Cologne 1975, p. 16–19.

150 Thomas Howard – the Earl of Arundel – also showed interest in sketches by Rubens in 1619, although it is unclear whether he ever succeeded in attaining any. Plomp 2005, p. 38.

151 The auction brought a total of 6,557 guilders and 16 nickels and Philippus Happaert bought drawings for 6,000 guilders. Wood 1994, p. 333–334.

152 The collection comprised drawings that were strongly influenced by Italian artists, such as a drawing of a Transfiguration in the style of Raphael. However, the collection also reflects a wider interest and features hitherto less valued drawings such as figure studies. On Everhard Jabach's collection, see among others: Peters 1975; Cat.-Cologne 1975.

stayed in Rubens's Nephew, Philip Rubens's possession. In terms of value, they comprised 8.5% of the total collection that Rubens had bequeathed to his descendants. At the end of the 17th century, Roger de Piles bought selected drawings from Philip Rubens.[153] Parts of this fraction went to de Piles' benefactor Pierre Crozat and were auctioned after his death in 1741.[154] Among these drawings was a collection of 94 studies of heads, which was repeatedly copied by French artists such as Antoine Watteau and Nicolas Vleughels. A large part of these sketches are part of the graphic collection of the *Albertina* in Vienna. Consequently, drawings that show stamps of the collections mentioned above – or are otherwise plausibly associated with the mentioned names – have a high probability of stemming from Rubens's personal collection. However, even this is no guarantee of autograph work, since Rubens's collection verifiably included works by Italian artists, as will be discussed below. Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that expedient drawings by his pupils were also kept among Rubens's own drawings. One drawing that gives cause to this assumption is a copy after Rubens's "*Adoration of the Magi*" in the *Louvre*, which probably served as a template for an eponymous print.[155] This work came from Rubens's *cantoor*, as it was verifiably part of Everhard Jabach's collection. At the time, the drawing was attributed to Rubens, but Max Rooses declared it as a work by Anthonis van Dyck.[156] If this attribution to Van Dyck is indeed correct, this drawing can be considered proof of the fact that Rubens included his pupils' work in his own prestigious collection when it suited him. Taking into account that the drawing is a copy of an existing painting, and Rubens was most likely above making copies of his own existing work, even *if* they served as a template, this hypothesis appears very plausible. In any case, Rubens's drawings fuelled his artistic repertoire and simultaneously carried on the long tradition of artists' collections, which was coined by Giorgio Vasari. In his "*Le Vite*" and "*Libro de' Disegni*" – undoubtedly known to Rubens – Vasari often refers to his own chronologically-organised collection of drawings, which included works from the early *Trecento* and concluded with Vasari's own drawings.[157] Rubens's collection of drawings can consequently be seen as not only a creative tool but a means of placing himself among the ranks of history's great artists.

153 The whereabouts of the remaining drawings remains unknown.

154 See: Eidelberg 1997, p. 234–235

155 The drawing is part of the Louvre's collection of prints and drawings ("*Adoration des Mages*", INV20306).

156 Rooses writes the drawing was "*exécutés probablement par Van Dyck*". See: Rooses 1892, V, p. 148–149.

157 De Girolami Cheney 2012, p. lvii.

4.3.1.1. Ricordi

Rubens's *cantoor* collection was certainly made up of a variety of different types of drawings. First, from the very outset of his career, Rubens seems to have copied artworks by other artists, so-called *ricordi*. An account by Samuel Hoogstraten – one of Rembrandt's pupils – conveys a somewhat conflicting picture insofar as Rubens was said to primarily rely on "*the treasure of his imagination*".[158] However, the body of evidence indicates differently: many of Rubens's *ricordi* have been preserved and they show numerous copies after paintings, drawings as well as statuary art (see, for instance: Fig. 18. p. 100). These copies were not precise reproductions of artworks, but allowed for a certain amount of creative freedom. Rubens's drawings generally do not reveal the model's artistic medium and when – for instance – copying a marble statue, he generally refrained from showing the characteristics of a sculpture such as reflections of the polished stone. Conversely, often Rubens slightly altered a figure's position in his drawings or added signs of life such as veins. A commonly-used material for *ricordi* was red, black and white chalk. Rubens either used these shades separately or combined them for polychromatic drawings.[159] Also, he did not necessarily create every *ricordo* from scratch. In some instances, he purchased original drawings by revered artists and reworked them to his liking.[160]

A large part of this category of drawings was carried out when Rubens was on his travels to the renowned centres of art in Italy as a young painter. Although Rubens made a large number of copies during this time, making drawings of other works was by no means a practice limited to an artist's early career and it cannot necessarily be equated with a learning posture. For instance, when travelling to Spain as an established painter in his fifties, Rubens was greatly influenced by the Spanish royal collection in Madrid, especially the works of Titian.[161]

158 This account was given in 1678. See: Logan 2006, p. 250. Accounts like these must be interpreted with caution as Rubens was famously already idealised during his lifetime as the "*Apelles of our century*" (see: Rooses/Ruelens 1887, II, p. 43–48.). If one takes all contemporary accounts about Rubens's life and methods literally, he would have to have been somewhat of a superhuman.

159 An example of Rubens's using three different colours in one sheet is the *ricordo* of "*The Prophet Joel*" after Michelangelo (*Départment des Arts graphiques, Musée du Louvre*, Paris; no. 20230). Around 1700, the term "*aux troix crayons*" was coined to describe this technique.

160 The reworking of drawings shows once again how different artworks and the background of their creation were regarded compared to our present-day understanding: reworking a fellow artist's drawing was certainly not understood as a lack of respect as it would perhaps be nowadays. The drawing of "*The Miracle of the Lame Man Healed by Saint Peter and Saint John*" in the *National Gallery of Art* in Washington D.C (no. 1975.69.1) serves as a telling example: it was initially done by an unknown Italian artist and quite vigorously reworked by Rubens. See for instance: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, cat. no. 26, p. 155.

161 During the 16th century, the collection had been significantly enlarged by Charles V and housed a matchless selection of works by Italian artists.

By copying the great artworks of antiquity, as well as more recent masters such as Titian or Michelangelo, Rubens was able to compile memory aides that served as influences throughout his entire career.[162]

Often a *ricordo* cannot necessarily be assigned to one specific Rubens painting. To the contrary, the drawings were repeatedly used and consequently certain motifs – more or less faithful to the model – recur in a number of different compositions. A noteworthy example of this practice is Rubens's engagement with antique statues such as the „*Torso del Belvedere*". He drew several *ricordi* of the statue during his stay in Rome and the *Torso's* distinctive crease above the belly button is worked into a countless number of Rubens's figures.[163]

As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, sketching nude women from life was not a common practice during Rubens's lifetime, which might come as a surprise given Rubens's countless depictions of the nude female body. Rubens mainly relied on his *ricordi* when depicting nude women and – as can be seen from numerous examples – his models did not necessarily have to be female.[164] The extent to which genders were interchangeable regarding the depiction of nudity becomes apparent when comparing the uppermost figure in a drawing of three female nudes (*Frick Collection*, New York), presumably for a depiction of Venus, with a study for the personification of the Nile (*Victoria and Albert Museum*, London), which was done for the painting of "*The Four Rivers*" in Vienna.[165]

When mirror inverting one of the two works, it becomes clear that the same rear-view pose was used for both a female and male figure. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that the depiction of the other two female nudes – positioned in the middle and the bottom of the sheet in the *Frick Collection* (below the female figure heretofore discussed) – are paraphrases after two artworks by Italian artists: one nude is based on a figure in the "*Ezekias*" spandrel of the Sistine

162 Several volumes of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard* are dedicated to Rubens's copies and adaptations. See: Van der Meulen 1968; Lohse Belkin 2009; Wood 2010a; Wood 2010b; Wood 2010c.

163 This includes the depiction of Saint Sebastian for the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" altarpiece, which will be discussed in detail in a following chapter (6.8.1).

164 Statues such as the "*Hermes Belvedere*" (*Vatican Museum*, Rome) or the "*Pothos*" (*Galleria degli Uffizi*, Florence) strongly influenced female bodies as well as his male figures. For photographs of the antique statues and corresponding drawings, see: Van der Meulen 1968, III, no. 54–57.

165 For reproduction of the drawing in the *Frick Collection* (inv. no. 1936.3.59), see: Held 1959, cat. no. 46; for an illustration of the drawing in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* (no. D.903-1900), see: White/Turner 2014, II, cat. no. 519; for the painting "*The Four Rivers*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna (Gemäldegalerie, 526), see: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 191, cat. no. 49.

Chapel and the other can be recognised from Titian's painting of the "*Andrians*".[166] Consequently, contrary to what one might assume upon first glance, the female nudes were not drawn after life, but have models in Italian art.

Besides practical reasons, there is a great art theoretical significance to making use of antique and Italian works of art and creating one's own adapted version. This practice of competing with other masters was described by contemporary authors as "*aemulatio*", a term that originates from rhetoric.[167] At the same time, it was commendable to slightly conceal these templates by bestowing the highest possible naturalness to one's depictions. Of course, Rubens was well aware of these different levels of meaning and generally obeyed by these "rules". As has been highlighted, his drawings after artworks most often show heightened signs of naturalness and life. Consequently, in his many drawings after renowned artworks Rubens fulfils the art theoretical specifications of his time to perfection.

4.3.1.2. Drawings from Life

Rubens made drawings from life first and foremost to meticulously capture specific poses or features of his figures. A passage from one of Rubens's treatises offers insights relating to his outlook on the practice of drawing after live models: concerning the ideal image of a male model, Rubens expresses his displeasure of being confronted with large bodies and weakened limbs far too frequently. He states that in contrast to this, the arms of swordsmen, the legs of dancers and the bodies of oarsmen achieve perfection through fervent training.[168] Rubens's drawings frequently include numerous detailed depictions of individual body parts on one sheet, usually slightly modified. For instance, this includes the detailed study of two legs next to the depiction of a sitting man in the *Victoria and Albert Museum*. This study was probably made for the painting of the "*The miracles of St. Francis Xavier*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna, although it was

166 A *ricordo* of "*Abiah, Achaz, and Hezekiah*" in the *Sistine Chapel* is in the *Musée du Louvre*, Paris (INV 20270). For an illustration, see: Glück/Haberditzl 1928, no. 13; Wood 2010c, II, no. 67/68. A Rubens copy of Titian's painting can be seen in the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm (NM 600), see: Wood 2010a, II, no. 51. The original painting of "*The Andrians*" by Titian is currently in the *Museo del Prado* in Madrid (no. P000418).

167 On the subject of Rubens's competitive emulation, see: Büttner 2011; and more recently: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 127–129; ibidem., p. 249–251. The issue of Rubens using statues as models for his figures will also be further discussed in a chapter below.

168 White 1988, p. 92.



Fig. 1: Peter Paul Rubens, *Seated Female Nude/Jeune femme nue, assise, tournée vers la droite*, 1633–1635, Red and black chalk, heightened with white body colour, traces of brush and brown ink, 46.3 × 28.3 cm, Département des Arts Graphiques du Musée du Louvre, Paris (INV 20.345).

later re-used for several other works.[169] Through works like this drawing, Rubens's meticulous approach to the depiction of his figures becomes clear, which was evidently greatly indebted to creating anatomically correct, life-like representations of the human body.

His often very revealing paintings gave rise to the notion that his depictions of the female body were influenced by drawings after female nude models. A part of a letter in which Rubens supposedly wrote to Sauveur Ferrary is often cited in this context.[170] In this letter, Rubens asks

169 Rubens's repurposing of drawings unfortunately often makes it difficult to find the specific painting for which it was originally made. It should also be kept in mind that in some instances the drawings were made without a specific composition in mind. For an illustration of the drawing of the two legs in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* (D.904/5-1900), see: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, no. 75. For an illustration of the painting in the *KHM* (Gemäldegalerie, 519) see: ibidem, no. 73, p. 215.

170 Only a part of this letter has survived and neither the exact date nor its place of origin can be established with certainty. See: Magurn 1955, p. 90, no. 51.

Ferrary to relay a message to Monsieur Jean Sauvages, namely to arrange a sitting with three Parisian ladies, whose black hair, striking expressions and figures would aid him tremendously in connection with the representation of sirens.[171] This letter is usually associated with Rubens's commission for the series of 24 paintings for Maria de Medici. However, the sirens depicted in the paintings have blonde rather than black hair and – more importantly – are portrayed completely naked. The idea of Rubens making studies after nude female models is highly unlikely considering the social norms of the time. If indeed the letter is authentic, he could only have alluded to studying the women's faces and their fully-clothed statures.[172]

Sheets such as "*Young Woman looking down*" (Fig. 48. p. 155) or "*Young Woman with Crossed Arms*" are noteworthy and telling examples of how Rubens portrayed women.[173] This shows how very differently the depiction of the female body was perceived, in contrast to the male – a gender difference in art easily traceable to Rubens's main influencers, namely Italian artists such as Michelangelo.[174]

If not from appointed female models, it is often believed that at least Rubens's wife – specifically his second wife Hélène, formerly Fourment – must have served as a source of inspiration. In this context, a drawing of a "*Seated Female Nude*" in the *Louvre* can be cited as an example (Fig. 1).[175] Hélène is generally thought to have been the model for this study, not least due to the fact that she is the only conceivable woman available to Rubens, given the aforementioned social conventions.[176] However, on closer inspection the figure in the drawing shows anatomical

171 Rubens writes: *"I beg you to arrange to secure for me, for the third week after this one, the two Capaio ladies of the Rue du Verbois, and also the little niece Louysa [sic]. For I intend to make three studies of Sirens in life size, and these three persons will be of infinitely great help to me, partly because of the wonderful expression of their faces, but even more by their superb black hair, which I find it difficult to obtain elsewhere, and also by their stature."*. Magurn 1955, p. 90, no. 51.

172 The letter suggests a certain acquaintance with Paris, considering Rubens's knowledge of the looks and names of the ladies as well as their residential address. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that the letter – if indeed written by Rubens – was composed subsequent to his first stay in Paris in 1622. Rubens travelled to Paris again in May 1623 and February 1625. In 1623, he already delivered nine of the 24 paintings, during a stage at which the designs for the whole cycle must have already been finalised. Consequently, even *if* the letter were authentic, it is more likely that the studies were made for some other unknown project.

173 The two drawings are kept in the *Uffizi* in Florence and the *Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen* in Rotterdam, respectively. See: Held 1959, cat. no. 113 and cat. no. 110.

174 As Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat highlights regarding Michelangelo's *"David"*, in stark contrast to the female nude, the male nude's nakedness is not reduced to eroticism, and a male nude's potential eroticism could be perceived alongside its status as an autonomous subject. Thus, nudity had a different, almost contrasting gender-specific meaning and function. Hammer-Tugendhat 1994, p. 49–51.

175 The drawing *"Jeune femme nue, assise, tournée vers la droite"* is listed under the inventory number 20345 in the *Departement des Arts Graphiques du Musee du Louvre.* See also: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 295, cat. no. 109.

176 See: Lohse Belkin 2006, p. 304.

weaknesses. For instance, her legs – especially from the knee downwards – are depicted disproportionally short. This raises the question of whether this study was indeed done after the living model, as a model would have allowed for a precise guide regarding the proportions. At this point, Rubens's strong drawing skills must be highlighted: his drawings generally do not show signs of anatomical inaccuracies. Therefore, this drawing cannot be accepted as a study of Hélène without reservation. There is consequently no concrete evidence in support of the assumption that Rubens made drawings after his wife's nude physique. On the contrary, it seems likely that studies after the female nude were generally not a reality in Rubens's creative process.

When looking for characteristics of Hélène in Rubens's paintings, one can distinguish between the depictions of a similar type of woman – which Rubens might have modelled after his wife to some degree – and those figures that clearly show her distinct facial features, which are known thanks to numerous official portraits. Regarding the latter, a letter from the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand to his brother – Philip IV of Spain – pertaining to Rubens's painting of the "*Judgement of Paris*" is worth mentioning: in 1639, Ferdinand elaborated on the fact that the depiction of the goddess Venus was modelled after Rubens's wife, who was the most beautiful woman in Antwerp.[177] However, this comparison to Rubens's wife primarily pertains to the figure's physiognomy, as her body is modelled after the classic figural pose of the "*Venus Pudica*", in a reference that would certainly have been obvious to the educated contemporary viewer.[178] The same is true for other depictions of other nude women equipped with Hélene's facial features, such as one of the figures in "*The Three Graces*".[179] Particularly worthy of emphasis in this context is the famous painting "*Het Pelsken*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna, which is sometimes interpreted as a nude portrait of Hélène.[180] In contrast to other, more idealised nudes, this painting shows a very life-like representation of a female body and the contemporary viewer can easily

177 In the original letter – which was composed in Spanish – Ferdinand wrote: "*La Venus que esta de enmedio es retrato muy parecido de su misma muger que sin duda es lo mejor de lo que ahora hay aquí*", cited after: Büttner 2006, p. 212. For the full letter, see: Rooses/Ruelens 1887, VI, p. 228–229. On the subject of Hélène as Venus for the "*Judgment of Paris*" and an illustration of the painting, see: Healy 1997, p. 99/234, Pl. 8.

178 Prominent examples include the "*Torso of a Venus Pudica*" in the *Galleria degli Uffizi* in Florence. For an illustration of the antique statue, see: Van der Meulen 1968, III, plate 105. The parallel becomes especially clear when looking at a copy after Rubens in the *Statens Museum for Kunst* in Copenhagen (inv. no. kksgb10349), see: ibidem, plate 108.

179 The painting of "*The Three Graces*" is kept in the *Museo del Prado* (P001670). Another figure whose physiognomy is based on a portrait of Hélène Fourment is – for instance – the depiction of Callisto in "*Diana and Callisto*" (also in the *Museo del Prado,* P001671). However, Callisto is fully clothed. For more examples, see: Lohse Belkin 2006, p. 300. Belkin noted that Hélène can be identified not only by her physiognomy but also from a distinct hairstyle, namely the fashionable "bouffant" coiffure. See: ibidem, p. 304.

180 The painting in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna has the inventory number "Gemäldegalerie, 688".

be seduced into imagining that Hélène truly did resemble the figure depicted in the painting.[181] Moreover, this work was a very private painting, and not necessarily meant for public display. Rubens explicitly left it to his wife and it can be assumed that it was not to be seen by anyone outside the family, which furthermore fuels the assumption of an intimate portrait.[182] This notion of "*Het Pelsken*" being a portrait of Hélène is opposed by an observation recently published by Gerlinde Gruber, who noticed that Hélène is generally shown with blue eyes in official portraits. This strongly suggests that blue was indeed her true eye colour, while the figure in "*Het Pelsken*" is depicted with brown eyes.[183] The brown eyes verifiably correspond with Rubens's ideals regarding female beauty, which included big dark eyes like those of a mare.[184] This meaningful detail reveals that "*Het Pelsken*" is hardly a portrait of Hélène, but merely a visual allusion to Rubens's wife. The figure can be interpreted as an allegory of modesty, exposed to the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer and only scantly protected only by her fur cover.

Hélène's physiognomy was at times deliberately incorporated into certain paintings, in both a private as well as a more public context. However, the notion of Rubens depicting realistic portrayals of his wife's nude body on paintings for the world to see cannot be confirmed.[185] As previously mentioned, when looking at Rubens's depictions of nude women it becomes clear that although the very life-like depictions might appear to have been done after human models, in most instances he modelled his female figures after antiques.[186] Likewise, more recent works of art such as paintings by renowned Italian masters of the cinquecento also served as sources of inspiration.[187]

In conclusion, it can safely be assumed that Rubens made drawings from life such as portraits or studies of specific gestures or postures. However, sketching persons of the opposite sex in the nude would have not been within the limits of what was socially acceptable during Rubens's

181 In this context, the previously-mentioned drawing in the *Louvre* (see footnote 175) is often seen as a preparatory study for the painting. See for instance: Lohse Belkin 2006, p. 304.

182 For Rubens's last will, see: Génard 1896.

183 See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 84.

184 Figures connected to the narrative of ideal beauty – such as Venus – were generally depicted with brown eyes. See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 79.

185 Hélène might have inspired her husband in less obvious ways, although the degree to which Rubens intuitively or subconsciously fused his wife's figure into his paintings has to remain unanswered.

186 A good example of this is his drawing after a statue of a *"Sleeping Hermaphrodite".* Today, the statue is in the *Musée du Louvre* (no. MR 220), and the corresponding drawing by Rubens is part of the *Metropolitan Museum's* collection in New York City (Accession Number: 1972.118.286).

187 Nils Büttner has shown – for instance – how Rubens adapted Titian's depiction of "*Venus and Adonis*" for his version of the same subject. See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 249–265.

lifetime. Considering Rubens's high social standing and respectability, it can be assumed that he would not have blurred the lines of propriety and decorum. Consequently, the cliché of the lusty bon vivant who had a passion for nude women can hardly be applied to Rubens based on his artworks. Notwithstanding, when it came to working out the details of a figure for a painting, studies after life were Rubens's way of ensuring the highest possible exactness.

4.3.1.3. Compositional Aides

There are a number of drawings that originated with a certain composition in mind, and which can be associated with the development of a specific work. They show the search for a particular composition, the placement of a certain figure within a composition or individual body parts. In terms of intended use, these types of drawings come closer to oil sketches given that they were made for a specific painting.

The first category comprises in-depth studies of specific details within a composition, which were done to work out certain details and at times even done after a living model. In these instances, this specific category of compositional aides tends to overlap with the "drawings from life" discussed in the previous chapter.[188] It can be assumed that when these drawings were made, the general outline of the composition would have been established and the rough allocation of the figure (or detail) in question determined. After all, in order to specifically position models correctly, Rubens would have to know how he would later arrange the figures in the painting. This is not to say that successful postures were then not also re-used repeatedly.[189]

A further, less detail-oriented category of drawings was also done with a specific composition in mind, namely the so-called *crabbelingen*, which literally means scribbling.[190] These sheets show disorderly strokes that are very different from the precise studies previously discussed and usually

188 Naturally, the prerequisite for the two categories to overlap is the premise that the detailed study after life was done with a specific composition in mind. The repurposing of the same drawing for other paintings would then also make it fit a different category.

189 In the previous chapter, a drawing of two feet in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* was mentioned and a further example of such a compositional aid is a drawing titled: "*Studies of Arms and a Man's Face*" in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in London (for an illustration, see: Held 1959, cat. no. 89). The sheet shows no less than six arms, outstretched in different angles and slightly altered poses. The purpose of a sheet like this was undoubtedly to find the ideal positioning without having to try and err later on in the process of painting. As mentioned in the previous chapter, initially these types of studies were most probably done for a specific painting, which again most likely did not stop the work from being useful for later compositions.

190 A sheet showing this technique – which is kept in the *Metropolitan Museum* in New York – will be discussed in detail in a chapter below.

only haphazardly map out the coarse contours of a composition. Nonetheless, *crabbelingen* do not necessarily show the whole composition, but sometimes merely depict individual figures or groups. For these preliminary designs, Rubens almost exclusively used pen and ink, and the drawings mostly comprise sketchy contours, sometimes with sporadic additional hatching. Apparently, Rubens had no need to address the exact details of figures or faces in these first designs. These sheets were purely done to clarify compositional questions, and often they show several versions of one figure, sometimes even overlapping on one sheet. In view of Rubens's extensive œuvre, *crabbelingen* are relatively sparse and the technique is only preserved on a few sheets. They mostly appear in correlation with his later works and this form of drawing could be owed to Rubens's progressing illness, which might occasionally have prohibited him from making more detailed designs.[191] Where in earlier creative periods the drawings would have been worked out to a more sophisticated degree, the *crabbelingen* would have been an ideal way of conveying his ideas to his employees with the least amount of physical effort. However, the circumstance that these sheets do not exist in connection to earlier works could also simply be owed to the fact that they were not held in such high regard and that Rubens did not save and store them as carefully.[192] After finishing a composition, in contrast to other categories discussed, these sheets could no longer serve any purpose and were perhaps more easily discarded.[193] Even outside of Rubens's own studio, collectors probably appreciated these types of drawings less throughout the centuries, which could also explain the small numbers. Consequently, these drawings could well have been more customary than has been generally suspected. However, it should be noted in this context that there are instances in which Rubens sketchily drew the outline of a composition immediately on the panel of the oil sketch, and in some cases also the painting.[194] Oil sketches done within a series comprising several works show that this technique was only used from time

191 Rubens suffered from gout, and letters from his contemporaries indicate that attacks of the disease periodically paralyzed his hands. See: Büttner 2007, p. 116–117.

192 For instance, Arnout Balis and Nico van Hout believe that many of these sheets were lost due to the lack of interest that 17th- and 18th-century collectors held in them. See: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 18. Anne-Marie Logan suspects that this disinterest was already with Rubens or the executor of his estate. Logan 2007, p. 169.

193 For instance, it would be quite conceivable that he did not carry sketches of this kind with him from Italy to Antwerp.

194 Loose underdrawings appear in a number of finished paintings. In some cases, this can only be detected through technical investigations (see – for instance – the infrared reflectography of "*Holy Family with Parrot*" in: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 24.), although sometimes they are visible to the naked eye. An example for the latter would be Rubens's portrait of his two sons in the *Liechtenstein Princely Collections* in Vienna, which will be discussed in more detail below.

to time.[195] Most probably the presence of these lines can be understood as a contraindication regarding the existence of a *crabbelingen* sketch.

It should be kept in mind when dealing with all kinds of preparatory work that it was done with a purpose in mind; for instance, if a drawing shows a certain figure or a group of figures that can also be distinguished in a finished painting, the first instinct is usually to declare the drawing as a preparatory work of that painting.[196] However, if that same finished painting shows traces of changes to the figure done during the process of painting, it is rather unlikely that the drawing in question – which resembles the end result – was done *before* the work, since the drawing would have served as a guideline and prevented the artist from having to make errors on the image carrier itself. In other words, if Rubens – or any artist for that matter – took the time, costly material and effort to make a preparatory work, it is very unlikely that the results of this work would not have been applied thereafter when creating the painting. This is not to say that spontaneous changes were not possible, as Rubens regularly abandoned preconceived notions; however, in these cases the figures found on the preparatory works are no longer similar to the finished result. In light of Rubens's demanding lifestyle, it can be expected that he never touched a pen without incentive and this concerns all forms of preparatory work, even if some forms – such as *crabbelingen* – would probably not have taken a huge amount of time or effort.

4.3.2. Oil Sketches

> "*There are curious spirits who as a result of much experimentation and experience can conjure up any scene whatsoever in the mind and execute it without any supplementary means. That, though, is not vouchsafed to all, but is an exceptional gift of a masterly brain, and is only fitting for small paintings with few figures* [...]"[197]
>
> Joachim von Sandrart

195 For instance, in the "*Life of Achilles*" series, the technological investigations revealed that these underdrawings were only done in some cases, interestingly in the less complex compositions. See: Cat.-Rotterdam 2003; Boersma/van Loon/Boon 2007. This could mean that the more difficult compositions were prepared with a drawing, which was not necessary in the simpler cases. This issue will be further addressed in the following chapter on oil sketches.

196 Theoretically, this makes perfect sense in terms of the consecutive order of preparatory steps. The sequence would start with a haphazardly-done *crabbelingen* sketch on paper, proceed with a more detailed drawing and presumably end with the most worked-out version of the oil sketches. However, Rubens's working process was most probably seldom this consistent.

197 Translation from: Von Sandrart 1675, I, 3, chapter VII, p. 72.

These were Joachim von Sandrart's thoughts on the subject of swiftly-executed, wet-in-wet oil sketches, written in 1675. In some respects, it is still an apt representation of what Rubens's oil sketches are deemed to be today. They are presumably a direct representation of Rubens's artistic genius and allow for an unfiltered view into the way in which his creative mind worked. For instance, in an exhibition catalogue from 2004, Rubens's oil sketches are described in the following unambiguous terms: "*An oil sketch is an original composition by Rubens* [which offers] *direct access to the creative process, concentrated and undiluted evidence of his mastery*".[198] François-Xavier de Burtin gave a rather different assessment in 1808: he had interviewed one of Rubens's ancestors, who claimed that Rubens had his assistants work on not only the paintings but also the preparatory oil sketches (*esquisses*) that were made after Rubens's rudimentary sketches.[199] In the end, Rubens would rework everything, according to necessity. It is consequently difficult to make a general statement regarding the oil sketches' execution. It can be assumed that the master himself did make some of the preparatory works autonomously. At the same time, assuming that the making of oil sketches was his task alone does not do justice to the complex structures of a multi-person workshop.

Rubens himself referred to an oil sketch as "*dissegno colorito*" – a colorful drawing or design – and quintessentially this is what they were.[200] As mentioned in the previous chapter regarding drawings, even though these works are considered individual pieces of art today, they were not created as such, but rather a means to an end. This is also evident from the fact that they were often painted on less expensive panels of lesser quality.[201] Concerning the reason for their fabrication, oil sketches pose a somewhat more complex issue compared with the drawings discussed above. First and foremost, they are considered to be draft versions that Rubens made for his personal use, by means of which he was able to figure out a composition's effect before transferring it to a much larger scale. A coloured version would naturally be able to convey this much more realistically than any drawing. This is by no means a technique exclusive to Rubens's process, but rather it is characteristic of many great Italian artists in whose footsteps Rubens sought to follow.[202]

198 Cat.-Cincinnati 2004, p. 10–11.

199 Burtin 1808, I, p. 157.

200 Rubens mentions one of his "*coloured designs*" – namely the oil sketch "*Saint Bavo about to receive the Monastic Habit in Ghent*" – in a letter to Archduke Albert of Austria. See: Magurn 1955, p. 56.

201 See for instance: Fraiture/ Dubois 2011b, p. 326.

202 For artists, visiting Italy – which was at the time a great centre of the arts – did not only inspire content-wise. Naturally techniques and studio practices were also absorbed. However, this is not to say that inspiration only flowed in one direction. Through their travels, artist from the north side of the Alps also carried knowledge southwards.

Second, an oil sketch provided the perfect tool for presenting the design to a patron for approval. It was not unheard of for patrons to outright reject finished paintings, as Rubens knew from his own experience. In the case of one of his earliest major commissions – namely the painting for the altar of the Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella in Rome (the principal church of the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri) – the finished work was rejected and Rubens was compelled to paint a second piece.[203] To avoid this kind of additional workload, showing off a sketch ahead of time could be beneficial. Finally, an oil sketch can be seen as a way of communication between the different members of a workshop. In theory, Rubens would create the sketch himself and then pass the design to his employees or students for them to transfer it to a large scale. Naturally, this would limit Rubens's own involvement to potential finishing touches.

Apart from the aforementioned scope of possibilities, the oil sketches have one common benefit, namely that just like Rubens's collection of drawings, the oil sketches would remain in his possession, making past compositions available to him even after the paintings themselves were sold. The notion that this was no minor concern is demonstrated by Rubens's reaction concerning his *modelli* for the ceiling paintings of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp:[204] when the Jesuits faced him with the choice of leaving the designs with them or exchanging the works for an additional altarpiece, Rubens chose the latter.[205] Considering that an altarpiece by Rubens was worth approximately 3,000 gilders, this choice says a lot about his strong appreciation for his *modelli*. With this in mind, it is not unlikely that oil sketches were also done *after* the finished painting, before it left the studio. Oil sketches are generally automatically categorised as preceding the finished paintings, although this might not always be the case.[206] As previously mentioned, making oil sketches was an ideal learning method and the possibility of the finished painting serving as a template should also be considered.

203 The first painting depicted the "*Ecstasy of Saint Gregory*", which Rubens later took with him to Antwerp and installed at his Mother's grave. According to Rubens's own claims, the main issue with the painting was that the canvas reflected too much. Rubens painted the second version on slate, a material that absorbs light to a greater degree. However, the fact that the second painting shows a different composition – namely a "*Madonna Adored by Angels*" – suggests that perhaps it was more than an issue of light reflection.

204 The church fell victim to a fire in 1718 and sadly the entire ceiling paintings were destroyed. For details, see footnote below.

205 For details on the commission and more specifically the contract between Rubens and the Jesuits, see: J. R. Martin 1968, p. 213–219.

206 The fact that Rubens kept copies after his own works which had left the studio is illustrated by a request of Duke Wolfgang Wilhelm: the duke wanted two drawings after altar pieces Rubens had made for two churches in Brussels. The originals had left the studio at that point and consequently the drawings must have been made after oil sketches that were still on site. See: Cat.-Munich 1990.

Rubens's process is usually recreated according to the material at hand, although there is always the possibility that additional material existed at one point. Not all works that bear the characteristics of a sketch can necessarily be considered "preparatory".[207]

In a similar vein, when there are two versions of a composition, a guiding principle should be that Rubens never copied his own work.[208] As has been said, making copies was very typically a task assigned to pupils and employees. Leaving the socio-historical argument aside that a master of Rubens's calibre would not devote himself to the relatively lenient task of copying compositions, it should also be kept in mind that Rubens was a very busy man.[209] His time was precious and consequently it can safely be assumed that his skills and authority as the studio's master were utilised efficiently. After all, there was only one master but many employees. Consequently, when there are two versions of a subject, one must be identified as a copy.

One of the most outstanding features of Rubens's oil sketches is the strong divergence concerning the level of completion. In some cases, the sketches are almost comparable to loose drawings, with colour only added sporadically. These types of oil sketches are often referred to as *bozzetti*, which is Italian for sketch or design. In other cases, the miniature paintings are worked out to such a degree that the term *sketch* hardly applies. There are also sketches that show various degrees of completion in a single sketch, with some figures worked out in great detail, while others are only hinted at. These varying levels of completion can potentially give an indication concerning the intended purpose.[210] For instance, it can be assumed that important patrons would only be shown the well-worked out sketches, or *modelli*, whereas loose drafts would indicate an in-house usage. However, the designs for some of Rubens's cycles show that it is not always this simple.[211] When looking at multiple sketches within one series – such as the "*Life of Achilles*" series – one would expect uniformity given that all sketches serve the same purpose. However, in the case of this series – which depicts the life of Achilles in eight compositions – the

207 This issue will be discussed in more length in the context of the case study; for instance, the "Stockholm" drawing is an example of an artwork that was categorised as "preparatory" prematurely. See chapters 6.2 and 6.2.1.

208 He famously made copies of artworks by other artists who he revered, such as Titian or Veronese, but copying his own compositions must be seen in a completely different light than these reinterpretations of (predominantly Italian) masterpieces.

209 For a detailed account of Rubens's routine, his many obligations and his general lifestyle, see for instance: Büttner 2006.

210 In some few cases, it was also the medium that demanded a slightly different execution. For instance, Rubens's design for a statue of Saint Norbert was painted in beige monochrome colours.

211 Rubens designed several series of paintings, such as the *Medici* Cycle for Maria de' Medici, widow of Henry IV of France and four tapestry cycles, including "*The Life of Achilles*".

sketches are worked out rather heterogeneously. The differences in execution are visible to the naked eye; for instance, Nico van Hout has highlighted that the herms framing the compositions are worked out very well in some compositions, and rather inept in others.[212] When the oil sketches were scanned in a technical examination via infrared reflectography during the course of an exhibition in Rotterdam, it was found that the sketches also differ in terms of how they were executed: some compositions show distinctive underdrawings, while others (especially the more complex designs) do not.[213] This is a rather peculiar circumstance, which the authors of the catalogue explain with the theory that Rubens made preparatory drawings for the more difficult compositions, which then rendered underdrawings unnecessary. Although this could potentially have been the case, it does not explain the divergence in completion visible to the naked eye. This could well be an indication of the fact that Rubens was not solely responsible for creating designs; rather, he may well have delegated the task of creating compositions to his more capable employees.[214]

It can be summarised that oil sketches represent a heterogeneous and multifunctional part of Rubens's process, an aspect that will be further discussed and exemplified in the following case study.

212 See: Cat.-Rotterdam 2003; Cat.-Cincinnati 2004, p. 78.

213 See footnote above and also: Boersma/van Loon/Boon 2007.

214 Nico van Hout assumes that the differences in the framing herms might be the result of careless restoration, but allows for the possibility of the studio's involvement. Cat.-Cincinnati 2004, p. 79.

4.3.3. Supports and Underdrawings

Most of Rubens's oil sketches are done on oak panel, and this seems to have also been his preferred support for paintings.[215] Nonetheless, roughly only around half of his works were done on panel, while the other half was painted on canvas, which had the great advantage of making them transportable over longer distances. This includes Rubens's major international commissions such as the *Medici Cycle*, the ceiling paintings for the Banqueting House in London and the paintings for the Torre de la Parada. Apart from obvious logistical motivations, when a major work was commissioned the choice of the support's material seems to have occasionally been the patron's. A particular case is well documented thanks to diligent book keeping on the patron's side, namely the Guild of the Arquebusiers. The guild had commissioned the "*Descent from the Cross*" altarpiece in 1611 and kept an exact record of their expenses, which shows that they themselves – not Rubens – paid the panel maker Hans van Haecht for his work.[216] The altarpiece of the "*Miraculous Draught of Fishes*" for the Guild of the Fishmongers in Mechelen is a similar example: guild officials ordered the panel in 1613, and after finalising a contract with Rubens five years later, the panel was sent to Antwerp to be painted, and returned to Mechelen the following year.[217]

According to regulations published in 1617 by the joiners' guild as well as the Guild of Saint Luke, every panel maker (*tafereelmaker or paneelmaker*) in Antwerp was obliged to have his panels inspected by the guild before selling them, or become liable to a fine of 12 guilders per piece.[218] If they passed the inspection, the panels would be branded with two hands and/or a castle – symbol

215 This seems to have been partly due to the exceedingly flat surface panels provided. See: Hartwieg 2018, p. 276.

216 The guild records also show that the members of the guild's council were closely involved with further decisions concerning the panel. On 4th April 1613, two members visited the Church of Saint Walburga to inspect the reverse side of the "*Elevation of the Cross*", which had been done by Hans van Haecht, the same panel maker who was also responsible for making the panel for "*The Raising of the Cross*". At this point, Rubens had already delivered the central panel, so the reason for their visit cannot have been to decide whether Van Haecht was the right man for the job, but perhaps to check if there was anything regarding the installation worth modifying. For a detailed account, see: Nieuwenhuizen 1962.

217 The contract between Rubens and the guild was only finalised on 5th February 1618. On 11th August 1619, three members of the guild travelled to Antwerp to escort the panel back up the river to Mechelen. See: Rooses 1892, II, p. 24/25, no. 252.

218 If panels did not pass the quality test, the inspector was even authorised to break them. See: Kirby 1999, p. 19. In the early-17th century, the craft of panel makers had been established within the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke, separate from the traditional joiners. See: Fraiture/Dubois 2011b, p. 314.

of the city – as well as the maker's mark.[219] Jørgen Wadum has highlighted that in practice these rules were not always complied with one hundred per cent, as he has encountered numerous inadequate panels that were nevertheless branded by the dean.[220] This indicates that besides quality control, the main objective of these regulations was to guarantee the guild's governance over panel production.[221] Rubens's œuvre includes panels without marks, which indicates that Rubens had the possibility to buy the panels straight from the maker without going through official channels, a special position that was perhaps made possible by his status as court painter. However, many panels indeed show markings and Michiel Vrient seems to have been Rubens's panel maker of choice.[222]

In a dendrochronological analysis of Rubens's paintings, only four out of 137 single boards contained remnants of sapwood, which tells of his panel makers' meticulous selection.[223] Thus, Rubens generally painted on panels made from high-quality wood. However, the quality of the individual boards is not the only decisive factor when it comes to the longevity of panels; indeed, his œuvre contains some paintings that are made on fragmented panels, insofar as that they comprise boards haphazardly pieced together to subsequently enlarge the painting surface.[224] Many of Rubens's paintings are too large to comply with the standard formats, but are still constructed properly. However, later enlargements are frequently more problematic: apart from problems with stability, colour differences visible to the naked eye reveal the enlargement in many cases. The reasons for these enlargements are easy to understand in some instances. We know of one case in which Rubens commissioned Michiel Vrient to belatedly enlarge a panel for the main altarpiece in the Cathedral of Our Lady due to a mistake in the measurement of its

219 For instance, the panel maker Michiel Vriendt would brand his initials MV into the back of his panels. If a maker failed to do so, he could be fined three guilders. On the making of panels in Antwerp, see: Van Damme 1990, p. 235/236. The two hands – which are also found on the city's coat of arms – recollect the legend of the founding of Antwerp: The giant Druon Antigoon had terrorised the region until he was defeated by Salvius Brabo, who chopped off his hands and threw them into the river Scheldt. On the different versions of the brands resulting from different branding irons and their chronology, see: Wadum 2007, p. 183ff.

220 See: Wadum 2007; Fraiture and Dubois come to the same conclusion, see: Fraiture/Dubois 2011b, p. 313/320; Fraiture/Dubois 2011a, p. 139.

221 See: Fraiture/Dubois 2011b, p. 314.

222 Another name that can be associated with the production of Rubens's panels is the aforementioned panel maker Van Haecht. For instance, he was also responsible for making the panels for Rubens's monumental „*Elevation of the Cross*" triptych. See: Fraiture/Dubois 2011b, p. 326.

223 Ideally, panels were made entirely of heartwood, which is harder and less susceptible to warping. See: Bauch/Eckstein/Brauner 1978, p. 216.

224 On the subject of Rubens's faulty and enlarged panels, see: Brown 1996; Von Sonnenburg 1980; Von Sonnenburg/Preußer 1980; Gatenbröcker/Kaul 2005; Renger 1994; and most recently: Hartwieg 2018.

hanging space, whereby the "*Assumption of the Virgin*" altarpiece was subsequently enlarged by 10 cm.[225] However, the rather obvious reason for a change in dimension – namely making a painting fit its place of destination properly – was not the only reason for belated changes to Rubens's paintings.[226] Panels were also enlarged for content-related reasons, such as spontaneous compositional changes. A noteworthy example is that of "*Judith and Holofernes*" in the *Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum* in Braunschweig.[227] As a study by Silke Gatenbröcker conclusively shows, the central panel was enlarged during the painting process, which resulted in boards being attached perpendicular to the core panel.[228] This was presumably done due to spur-of-the-moment changes to the painting's composition and it did not occur as seldom as one might think. In her study on paintings from the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin, Babette Hartwieg showed how variant the process of enlarging panels was: in some cases, Rubens's paintings were enlarged by the panel maker, sometimes during the painting process and sometimes years after the painting had initially been completed.[229]

Connecting boards without the grain of the wood running parallel causes problems concerning the durability, when the wood moves due to changes in the surrounding temperature or air humidity. Consequently, irrespective of the core panel's quality, the attachments inevitably lead to greater instability. Concerning the aforementioned painting of "*Judith and Holofernes*" in Braunschweig, Gatenbröcker concludes that it is hardly imaginable as a commissioned painting

225 Vrient was paid 38 guilders to enlarge the panel for the *"Assumption of the Virgin"* altarpiece, *"which was too small"*. See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 403. The largest panels available seem to have been 340 cm and panels of this size were used for the very large paintings such as *"The Elevation of the Cross"*. On panel making techniques, see: Wadum 1995; For a study on the enlargement of panels in Rubens's œuvre, see: Renger 1994; and more recently: Hartwieg 2018. Of course, painting on canvas poised the same problem, as cloth also came in certain "standard" formats that were contingent on the size of the weaving loom. Many of Rubens's large canvas paintings show a seam, visible to the naked eye.

226 See: Renger 1994, p. 157; Van de Velde 1975b, p. 272ff.

227 For further details on the painting in the *Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum (GG 87)*, see: Cat.-Braunschweig 2004.

228 See: Gatenbröcker/Kaul 2005, p. 17ff. A further telling study on the subject of enlarged panels was recently done by Gerlinde Gruber on the painting of Hélène Fourment ("*Das Pelzchen*") in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna. See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 273ff.

229 See: Hartwieg 2018. For instance, in the case of a *"Landscape with Cows and Duck Hunters"*, it was the panel maker himself who enlarged the panel (p. 286). In the case of a portrait allegedly of Rubens's first wife, this was definitely not the case (p. 279). A portrait of a small child with a bird was enlarged over 20 years after it had been begun (p. 280.), while in some cases – such as *"The Conquest of Tunis by Charles V"* – the enlargement was made at the very outset of the painting process (p. 283). In other instances, it is more difficult to determine the motivation for the change in size, the exact time of the enlargement and whether it was done by in Rubens's workshop or at a later date.

due to its physical condition.[230] Thus, it is not altogether surprising that many of these enlarged paintings show private content such as family portraits, whereby this issue will be discussed in greater detail below.[231]

For panels to be sufficiently smooth to paint on, they were first prepared with a chalk (calcium carbonate) and animal glue ground layer. This was very common at the time as it created an even surface. On top of this ground layer, a greyish *imprimatura* containing lead white was applied. Rubens's *imprimatura* is on the lighter side of what was typically used and the characteristic underground was an integral part of creating a painting.[232]

Canvases were primed slightly differently. First, they had to be fitted into frames and stretched before they could be primed. Subsequently, they were painted with glue, which would make the canvas less absorbent and then – as with the panels – a chalk ground followed by the characteristic grey *imprimatura* would be applied.[233] However, with canvases, the ground mixture of calcic carbonate, a low proportion of lead white and earth particles was also mixed with linseed oil.[234]

Generally, coating the panel was the panel maker's task after the inspection, although this was perhaps different in Rubens's special case. When visible, the *imprimatura* in Rubens's paintings is of a very characteristic streaky finish and this specific feature would indicate that it was applied in his workshop.[235] One occasion is known in which Rubens chose to outsource the job of priming a panel to Adriaen Schut.[236] However, this was a commissioned work and it is difficult to say how Rubens proceeded when ordering panels for his everyday business. The analysis of the ground layer of many paintings shows variations, which could easily be explained by different hands working in the workshop. However, it is also conceivable that a primer (a so-called *plamuurder* or *witter*) generally applied the ground layer and only the characteristic *imprimatura* was applied in Rubens's workshop.[237]

230 See footnote 228.

231 See chapter 5.2 below.

232 For instance, in Rembrandt's œuvre, the ground layers are usually much darker or more red-toned and the *imprimatura* a lot warmer. See: Von Sonnenburg 1980, p. 14.

233 On the execution of large Altarpieces on canvas, see: Dubois 2007, passim.

234 For more information on the formulation of paint layers, see: Sedano Espín/Sánchez Ledesma 2005.

235 On Rubens's use of streaky *imprimatura* as a preparatory layer, see: Boersma/van Loon/Boon 2007, p. 82.

236 Adriaen Schut was registered at the Guild and paid 8 guilders to coat the panel for the "*Assumption of the Virgin*" in 1625. See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 403; Renger 1994, p. 157.

237 Von Sonnenburg 1980, p. 15.

As with the wooden panels, canvases could be bought already prepared for painting. It is also difficult to establish whether Rubens chose to buy ready-made canvases or if the priming was done in his workshop. The inventory of Rubens's estate shows a payment to a certain Hans Diericx for *schilderlynwaet*, which was probably sold untreated.[238] In any case, given Rubens's immense output, outsourcing as little as possible seems like the logical thing to do handling wise.

It was fairly usual to sketch the first contours of a painting (or also an oil sketch) with brush and diluted ochre or umbra toned oil paint. This step is visible in an unfinished painting in the *Rubenshuis* in Antwerp, namely "*Henry IV in the Battle of Ivry*". Although a series of paintings for Henry IV was planned, Rubens never finished the commission and consequently this work remained incomplete.[239] In such cases, the underdrawing was not merely a part of the design process—namely a means to create the outlines of a composition—but rather it helped in developing the depth and colour changes in future layers. For instance, light reflects in the depicted armour are likewise already applied with the purpose of shining through the subsequently-applied paint.

Underdrawings in the traditional sense – namely with a charcoal pencil, metal point or graphite – seem to play a relatively minor role in Rubens's paintings and they are only traceable in a few cases.[240] Unfortunately, underdrawings are generally difficult to detect, especially if paint was subsequently applied in line with the outlines of the drawing. Consequently, it is difficult to make definite assertions. Nevertheless, Rubens's painting process is typically rather unpredictable and often his compositions are subject to belated changes, which could have also influenced his reluctance to make preliminary drawings directly on the support. One possible reason for using underdrawings sparingly is the drawback that when diverging from the sketched outlines, the charcoal can often be detected through thin or light-coloured sections of a painting with the naked eye. Consistent with this argument is the observation that oil sketches show underdrawings more often than finished paintings.[241] Presumably the lines were less bothersome in preparatory material than they were in finished paintings.

238 Kirby 1999, p. 26.

239 This work reveals another very interesting part of Rubens's working process, namely the collaboration with fellow masters, in this case fellow court painter Pieter Snayers. He had been Sebastian Vrancx's pupil, who is considered the forefather of battle scenes and later became the official painter of battle scenes to the House of Habsburg. In this particular painting, Snayers had previously already finished the terrain and the forces in the background in his workshop in Brussels.

240 For instance, Hubert von Sonnenburg mentions "*The Watering Place*" in the *National Gallery* in London as a telling example. See: Von Sonnenburg 1980, p. 19; and more specifically on the subject of this particular painting: G. Martin 1966.

241 Noteworthy and well-researched examples of oil sketches under which underdrawings were detected are the previously-mentioned sketches for the "*Life of Achilles*" series (see the above chapter on oil sketches).

Underdrawings seem to have stayed especially apparent since Rubens made underdrawings over the *imprimatura* instead of under it, which was Flemish custom.[242] For instance, underdrawing can be detected with the naked eye in Rubens's portrait of his two sons – Albert and Nikolas – in the *Liechtenstein Princely Collections*, Vienna. Nikolas's left foot in a crème stocking shows fine black lines shining through the light-coloured paint. This is a noteworthy example insofar as the private image content would generally point towards an execution by the master himself. This stands in contrast to the assumption that underdrawings served as a guide for workshop employees, a plausible notion that was fuelled by Otto Sperling's account of Rubens's workshop practices.[243]

One question that should be addressed is how the underdrawings relate to preparatory material. When Rubens designed or prepared a composition via an oil sketch, would that render underdrawings in the finished painting irrelevant?[244] Or conversely, are underdrawings only found in paintings that were not prepared via sketch or oil sketch? Generally, the sporadic presence of underdrawings would indicate a fairly irregular designing process. Additional technical studies and art historical research along these lines could potentially offer remarkable insights.

242 See: Von Sonnenburg 1980, p. 19.

243 See footnote 130.

244 The same question would also apply to the underdrawings found on oil sketches and their relation to antecedent preparatory drawings, such as *crabbelingen*.

5. Determining Single-Handedness in Rubens's Œuvre

5.1. Connoisseurship

When dealing with the attribution of paintings, at some point one is inevitably confronted with the term "connoisseurship", and in the following chapter the basic features as well as the problems that arise from this practice will be briefly discussed. Considerations were made with reference to old master paintings and most observations are only valid in this context.

As Nils Büttner highlights, connoisseurship is falsely considered to be an art historical method since the times of Max J. Friedländer, although it is much rather "*a more or less consciously-driven application of a whole set of methods*".[245] Ultimately, connoisseurship can be categorised as a form of contemporary reception of artworks, in its essence not dissimilar to what viewers already practised at the time of the artworks' origination.

A connoisseur's core mission is to determine the authorship of paintings and – in further consequence – their date of origin. This is achieved through examining a work's stylistic and technical traits, and matching those traits to an equivalent group of works that bear the same characteristics. Traditionally, the ability to compare and attribute the painting should stem from the connoisseur's strong familiarity with comparative material. When practising connoisseurship, artworks are classified according to their uniform and reproducible stylistic traits, which neglects the concept of an artwork's uniqueness. After all, "style" is a summative term that can only be determined by investigating a series of works. In today's scholarly climate, style and the analysis of style play a subordinate or minor role for various reasons, including the modern situational and performative understanding of art, which rejects holistic concepts. Nevertheless, the concept of "style" is indispensable to the subject of Art History, not least because it is closely linked with art historical practice. When an unsigned painting stands by itself with no other clues such as historical documents available, connoisseurship is more or less still the only way of categorising a work by establishing an artwork's authorship or its affiliation to a specific "school". Consequently, art historic research still builds on the strong legacy of pioneering scholars such as

245 See: Büttner 2017, p. 43.

Max J. Friedländer or Abraham Bredius, whose findings were based on archival documentation as well as connoisseurship. The categories drawn up by the results of connoisseurship shape the field until today; for instance, through the prevalent illustrated *catalogues raisonnés*.[246]

Given the significance that connoisseurship has held to the subject of Art History, the underlying issues of attributing artworks – such as the existence of workshop production – and the principles associated with this line of questioning have not been discussed by scholars as sufficiently as one might anticipate.[247] On the other hand, the question of how to go about connoisseurship correctly has been the cause of much debate. In 1895, Abraham Bredius wrote about a painting by Rembrandt: "*A single glance at the whole, an inspection of the technique that required no more than seconds, were all that was necessary to convince me at once that here, in this remote region* [...] *hung one of Rembrandt's greatest masterpieces*".[248] Max J. Friedländer understood connoisseurship in similar terms: to him, the essence of traditional connoisseurship is the ability to recognise the hand of a painter based on experience. He compared a connoisseur's subjective intuition to the magnetic needle of a compass, pointing the way not despite but rather because of its trembling and vibrating.[249] To him, more objective indications such as contracts and deeds are to a connoisseur what solid ground beneath one's feet is to a swimmer.[250]

Bredius and Friedländer both promoted an intuitive approach to assessing art, in which case the attribution is entirely dependent on the instinct of the person doing the attributing. Other art historians sought to achieve a higher level of objectivity. The Italian politician, physician and art historian Giovanni Morelli can be considered the founder of a more transparent method. To Morelli, certain formal features of paintings such as individual body fragments represented the key to the attribution process. For instance, he deemed the basic shape of both the hand and the ear characteristic with all independent masters and therefore crucial to ascertaining their

246 For example, Anne-Marie Logan highlights that Julius Held's publications on the work of Rubens remain the standard reference for any research on the artist. See: Logan 2007, p. 160. A strong awareness of ongoing influence is especially important insofar as that the judgements of any connoisseur can be biased by political agendas or professional alliances. For a historiographical study on – for instance – Rembrandt connoisseurship, see: Scallen 2004.

247 More recent noteworthy publications on the subject include: Schwartz 1988; Talley 1989; Scallen 2004; Tummers 2009; Tummers 2011; Schwartz 201a4.

248 Boer/Leistra 1991, p. 17.

249 See: Friedländer 1942, p. 116.

250 Friedländer 1942, p. 107.

works.[251] This method of drawing comparisons has the great advantage of being rationally verifiable. Nevertheless, it is debatable whether the claim that artists leave a "fingerprint" in the form of individually-depicted body parts is valid.

In any case, both approaches have some justification, even the intuitive approach, which is certainly less scientific. Ernst Gombrich argues that the incapacity to rationally describe an insight does not render it irrelevant. He compares the intuitive process of connoisseurship with the ability to recognise a familiar voice over the telephone: a skill that we possess but cannot explain rationally.[252] Contemporary research along these lines offers new understandings concerning the adaptive unconscious and our brain's ability to register signals long before we can explain them rationally.[253]

Although these two doctrines of connoisseurship – the "morellian" and the intuitive approach – leave much room for discussion, there used to be no real alternative to trusting one's connoisseur of choice: without the means to prove an attribution wrong, connoisseurship was to some degree infallible. Fellow scholars generally accepted attributions made by renowned art historians such as Max J. Friedländer.[254] However, when new ways to examine paintings emerged in the form of technical investigations, connoisseurship as a whole came under increased pressure concerning its validity.[255] For instance, it became increasingly customary to examine paintings across a larger range of the electromagnetic spectrum during the course of the

251 Morelli writes: *"Allow me to cite the characteristic features by which one can discern the works of Palma Vecchio from those of his imitators and students. With Palma, the ear has a large round auricle that ends in a pointed lobe. Whereas in the case of Bonifazio, the ear is always elongated"* (Lermolieff 1891, p. 26–27). This approach was pursued by scholars such as Maurits van Dantzig who developed a method of establishing 100 criteria for comparisons that he called "Pictology". See: Van Dantzig 1973.

252 Gombrich 1952, p. 656.

253 See for instance: Gladwell 2005.

254 One telling example of the authority that the renowned art historians had regarding attributions is the drawing of the *"Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints"* in the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm (Held 1986, no. 171, p. 136.). The work will be discussed in more detail below, but in this context it is interesting to note that the work was considered to be by Anthonis van Dyck until Frits Lugt – a well-known connoisseur – attributed the work to Rubens (see: Lugt 1925, p. 200.). Only Leo van Puyvelde ever challenged this attribution, albeit with little consequence (see: Van Puyvelde 1940, p. 83.). Lugt's attribution prevailed and the drawing was generally considered to be by Rubens until the emergence of a second drawing on the subject in the early-2000s. See: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 140ff. In the case of Max Friedländer – who was of Jewish descent his enormous reputation as a connoisseur and art expert protected him from being deported by the Nazis during World War II. See: Wendland 1999, p. 163ff.

255 Some forms of technical investigations have been around since the 19th century, although art historians did not generally utilise them until around the middle of the 20th century. For instance, Julius Held was an early advocate of using technical investigations. See: Scallen 2007, p. 192.

20th century.[256] The human eye can only detect a wavelength between 400nm to 700nm, whereas other wavelengths have the ability to reveal invisible differences in paint or penetrate layers.[257] Moreover, some organic materials such as certain pigments, fluoresce when excited by UV light and can thereby be detected. Infrared photography and infrared reflectography have the ability to penetrate paint layers, potentially revealing preparatory layers.

To some degree, the findings based on technical investigations simply offer more material for the "connoisseur". The prevailing method (or set of methods) to evaluate paintings by making comparisons was not necessarily revolutionised, as the results still heavily depend on the interpretation of new findings. This becomes especially clear when it comes to determining whether a specific master completed a painting, or whether it stems from his workshop.[258] When faced with the problem of workshop employees, the works in question stem from the same time period and are made of the same material as the canon of autograph works. In these cases, additional technical material such as x-ray images simply add to the accumulation of comparative material, whereas the analysis of the panels or the paint itself can hardly offer additional clues.[259] Consequently, attributions are eventually mostly made based on connoisseurship.

In cases where the work in question is further removed from the canon of reference paintings in time or place (or both), technical examinations have the ability to expose false attributions. For instance, evidence provided by dendrochronology or the examination of the pigments or binding agents can potentially contradict an assumption based on connoisseurship.[260] This is not

256 X-ray was the first wavelength to be used on paintings and has been available since the end of the 19th century. Ultraviolet light has been in use to examine paintings since around 1920. One of the first publications to include an infrared photograph was published in 1940 (by the *National Gallery Laboratory*). Infrared reflectography was developed in the late-1960s by Johann R. J. van Asperen de Boer (see: Van Asperen de Boer 1970). During the last decades of the 20th century, it became prevalent to publish technical findings not only in specific journals but also in more mainstream publications such as exhibition catalogues. On the development of the different methods of technical investigations, see: MacBeth 2012; Stoner 2012. On the recently-developed ma-XRF scanning – an analytical imaging technique using macro X-ray fluorescence – see: Alfeld/Vaz Pedroso/van Eikema Hommes 2013.

257 For instance, some materials such as specific pigments fluoresce when excited by UV light. Infrared photography and infrared reflectography even have the ability to penetrate paint layers, potentially revealing preparatory layers.

258 Although this is a line of questioning not compliant with contemporary practices, the question arises.

259 For instance, the existence of underdrawings can sometimes offer additional clues regarding the painting's authorship within a workshop. On the study of underdrawings, see: Van Asperen de Boer 1985.

260 Naturally, this is only applicable when the painting in question was executed at a much later date than assumed by the connoisseur and this is potentially the case with forgeries. Although exposing wrong attributions with the help of this kind of technical evidence can discredit the method of connoisseurship as a whole, as has been said, the findings themselves offer no additional help with the process of attributing a painting when it comes to choosing between two contemporary artists.

to say that the investigation of a painting's support or paint layer offers certainty. For instance, it is possible to create forgeries on top of 17th-century paintings and use pigments that are coherent with those used by old masters. Nevertheless, a number of scandals challenged the authority of connoisseurship during the 20th century, in which technical investigations offered key clues.[261] It became apparent that in some cases a technical analysis of a painting could effortlessly debunk any assessment by even the most learned scholar or connoisseur.[262] One example of this would be a painting depicting a landscape and the seven deathly sins (*Geneva Fine Arts Foundation*), which was periodically attributed to Hieronymus Bosch. The dendrochronological investigation by Peter Klein suggested a date of origin around 1530, more than two decades after the painter's death.[263]

For a certain period of time, there was some confidence that technical investigations could provide key evidence and help to further objectify the attribution process; for instance, when the Rembrandt Research Project announced that it would make the greatest possible use of technical investigations, there was hope that the main doubts regarding authorship would be dispelled with the help of new examination methods.[264] Today, it has become very clear that the technical analysis of artworks is unable to answer all problems regarding the attribution of works, nor will it put connoisseurs out of work.[265] To the contrary, contextualising the growing volume of information produced by these new methods has become a challenge in itself. However, simultaneously the art of connoisseurship is decried as outdated and its legitimacy as a "method" within the subject of Art History is strongly challenged.

Despite its shortcomings, ultimately connoisseurship is indispensable when dealing with the attribution of old master paintings. The *catalogues raisonnés* of the previous centuries were

261 For instance, a very famous scandal involved the forgery of numerous paintings by Han van Meegeren, a deceit that was only uncovered through Van Meegeren's confession. Scientific tests on the paintings that revealed the use of phenol-formaldehyde confirmed his statement. See: Tummers 2009, p. 18ff. This scandal will be discussed in more detail below.

262 However, technical examinations should not be overestimated as they only very seldom offer "knockout" evidence. For instance, Julius Held – in principle an advocate of technical examinations – published an article in 1848 titled "*The Stylistic Detection of Fraud*", in which he stressed the superiority of connoisseurship over technical investigations when distinguishing forgeries. See: Held 1948, p. 181. For more on Julius Held, see: Scallen 2007.

263 See: Büttner 2014, p. 33–34.

264 See: Van de Wetering 2015, p. 10.

265 Nonetheless, a superficial discussion concerning the necessity and purpose of scientific analysis on paintings is not yet contended. All too often the art historian's indispensable ability to interpret any type of result is emphasised and scientific findings are often viewed with scepticism. This certain element of uncertainty towards new technical possibilities is not an exclusive trait of the subject of art history. For instance, journalism is confronted with unprecedented amounts of data, but nevertheless public trust in the free media is at an all-time low.

established by connoisseurs or with the help of connoisseurship, and they still constitute the capital stock of art historical knowledge. Gary Schwarz quite rightly states: "*If you can not live with* [connoisseurship], *you cannot live without it either*".[266] Looking more closely into the problematic nature of connoisseurship leads to the conclusion that the practice's main problem is not the subjectivity associated with the comparative visual analysis of a painting. It is for this reason that technical examinations did little to eliminate possible doubts with respect to attributions. It is very likely that at some point in the future technology will be able to compare paintings more accurately than the human eye. All the same, this would not suddenly answer all questions of attribution. The reasons for this predominantly lie in the paintings' complex production process.

Connoisseurship builds on the premise of a substantial autograph core œuvre. When attributing a painting to a certain artist, the work is either rejected or included into this artist's nucleus of autograph work by assessing a painting's stylistic conformity and its overall quality. The problematic nature of these queries becomes clear when one recalls the "Van Meegeren" affair, one of the largest art world scandals of the 20th century. Han van Meegeren succeeded in deceiving numerous scholars – including the well-known connoisseur Abraham Bredius – by passing a self-made forgery as an authentic painting by Jan Vermeer. The *Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum* subsequently acquired the painting and the deceit was only uncovered years later when Van Meegeren confessed to having painted the work himself in a statement before court.[267] If the painting had been completely stylistically compliant with Vermeer's œuvre, this error in judgement might be easier to understand. However, the painting's characteristics differed from what was usually considered typical for Vermeer and therefore the painting was declared as an "early work". There is hardly any reference material from Vermeer's early creative period and thus the forgery's characteristics were admitted to the canon of Vermeer's stylistic traits. To the contrary, the painting's otherness gave it distinction as a rare key piece of an otherwise under-represented period. In this particular case, the truth was eventually discovered.

266 See: Schwartz 1988, p. 262.

267 Van Meegeren was accused of having sold paintings – among them a Vermeer – to Hermann Göring during WWII. He saved himself from a conviction for treason by revealing the works had been forgeries. For further insights on the scandal, see: Tummers 2009, p. 18ff.

The incident exemplifies how easily a single painting – falsely accepted into the catalogue – can alter paragons and change the way in which we perceive a whole œuvre. Consequently, every question of attribution is highly consequential and a painting can never be assessed in isolation.

If modern technical investigations such as the analysis of pigments expose paintings done in later years and make it increasingly difficult to make forgeries, this still leaves the issue of those works manufactured during an artist's lifetime, sometimes even in the same studio. The question that needs to be addressed is whether it is even possible to single out single-handedly done works. In order to make any assumptions, an in-depth analysis of a painter's working methods should precede any consideration. In simple terms, it is less a question of *how* paintings are compared to one another, but much rather *which* comparisons are made. Historical practices cannot be ignored for the benefit of the modern perception of art and resultant assumptions. If finding a painting's sole creator is not always compatible with historical practices, the line of questioning must adapt correspondingly.

5.2. Rubens's Elusive Core Œuvre

In order to embark on the issue of single-handed execution in Rubens's canon of works, it is necessary to address the aforementioned "core œuvre". The key question of course is whether 17th-century artists generally even created a core œuvre of autograph paintings. In the following, the issue of whether parts of Rubens's œuvre can be categorised along these lines will be examined.

It should be highlighted in advance that Rubens usually did not sign his works. This includes paintings, oil sketches and drawings.[268] There are countless examples of paintings or drawings with signatures or initials; however, these were generally added at later dates.[269] The only works that customarily include his name are the captions of prints, which are commonly inscribed with "*PPRubens pinxit*" (or similar), which indicates that Rubens was the inventor of the composition.[270]

268 There are only six paintings and one drawing in which Rubens seems to have made an exception to that rule. As Nils Büttner observes, it is no longer possible to determine why these particular works were signed and dated. See: Büttner 2018, p. 418/No. 47.

269 For the very few exceptions, see footnote above.

270 The engraver can usually be identified with the epithet "*fecit*" or "*sculpsit*", whereas the publisher was sometimes cited with an "*excudit*". For a catalogue of Rubens's title pages, see for instance: Bertram/Büttner 2018.

When looking at Rubens's biography, it quickly becomes clear that after he became a master, he was unfailingly accompanied by at least one of his pupils.[271] Thus, it can reasonably be assumed that Rubens never created an autograph painting in today's sense of the term, meaning that he did everything in a painting from top to bottom. To begin at the very base, Rubens most probably refrained from prepping his painting underground or mixing colours himself. The same most likely applies for less important parts of a composition. For instance, as the head of the workshop, Rubens can hardly be suspected to have spent hours on meticulously shaping background leaves in trees or bunches of grapes.

However, there is a certain type of execution that points to the master's single-handed involvement insofar as it presupposes a confident and quick execution. As has been established through evidence such as the letter to Sir Dudley Carleton, the common method for working together was that pupils of employees would set up a painting, to which Rubens would later add the finishing touches. In Rubens's own words, the workshop's involvement in these paintings would then hardly be discernible.[272] Nonetheless, it would necessarily result in more layers of paint.[273] However, in some paintings, the paint is applied in a manner that rules out an appliance in more than one step: in some cases, the paint was applied in such a thin and opaque layer that the *imprimatura's* streaky finish still shines through. Of course, one paint layer means one step of application, inherently by one person. The very thinly-applied paint is especially often apparent in flesh tones and a most spectacular example of this is the "*Venus in Front of the Mirror*".[274] The stroke of the brush with which the *imprimatura* was applied is still visible through the paint of Venus's skin, which results in a striking, life-like effect.[275] Although this would seem like an almost fool-proof way of determining single-handedness, it nevertheless does not guarantee Rubens's own involvement, as it still cannot be ruled out that skilful assistants were also capable of this way of painting. While paintings that show this technique are usually thought of as the works of the highest quality within Rubens's œuvre, the question remains whether a certain body of works can be considered more likely to be by the master's own hand based on criteria that do not pertain to the painting's stylistic traits.

271 This is also true for the work he completed outside of Antwerp. See the above chapter on Rubens's studio.

272 Rubens writes: "*Yet Your Excellency must not think that the others are mere copies, for they are so well retouched by my hand that they are hardly to be distinguished from originals.*" Magurn 1955, p. 60–61.

273 Regarding Rubens's painting technique, the existence of numerous layers and how these layers hint towards numerous participating hands, research by Jørgen Wadum offers insights. See for instance: Wadum 1996.

274 The painting is part of the *Liechtenstein Princely Collections* in Vienna (GE120).

275 On Rubens's flesh tones, see for instance: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 72–73.

As it turns out, not only the application of paint is potentially telling of the artwork's maker. The previously-discussed enlargement of panels and – in some cases – canvases is a further peculiarity regarding Rubens's image carriers. It has been observed that within Rubens's œuvre there are a number of paintings that were done on somewhat faulty panels.[276] Apart from few exemptions that were enlarged for necessary reasons not pertaining to their content (for instance, due to spatial requirements at the painting's planned location), fragmented panels very often show depictions of close family members and landscapes: in other words, paintings that were perhaps never meant for the market, but evidently made for Rubens's own use. A good example of this is "*Hélène Fourment in her Wedding Dress*", which was started on a smaller panel, but enlarged on three sides and thus turned into a full-length portrait.[277] In contrast to enlargements that were done during or after the initial painting process and perhaps due to impulsive changes of heart, the painting of Hélène was intentionally done on a fragmented panel. This can be determined due to the fact that the paint layer between the core panel and the enlargements is seamless, which indicates that the core panel had not been fully painted at the point of enlargement.[278] Consequently, the choice of using a fragmented support of lower quality was made knowingly in the case of Hélène's portrait, a painting which was evidently made for Rubens's home. The obvious reason for this use of panels of lower quality would have been the lower cost.[279]

The fact that this procedure frequently concerns paintings with private subjects is hardly surprising, as Rubens sold his paintings for exceptionally high sums and was doubtlessly expected to deliver his compositions on impeccable supports. It is difficult to imagine a buyer approving of a fragmented panel, and thus it makes sense that Rubens would principally only have used flawed panels for his own private use. However, these enlargements exist in a number far too large to consider them all part of his personal collection. Perhaps they were fit to be sold on the open market and possibly the panel's condition was reflected in the painting's price. In any case, the paintings that were done on faulty panels *and* show private subjects (such as the portrait of Rubens's wife or landscapes) can be considered more likely to be made for Rubens's own collection and plausibly more often painted by the master himself.

276 On the subject of Rubens's faulty and enlarged panels, see chapter 4.3.3.

277 This painting of Rubens's second wife is on display in the *Alte Pinakothek* in Munich (no. 340).

278 See: Renger 1994, p. 159.

279 See: Fraiture/Dubois 2011a, p. 136.

However, in the context of Rubens's private art collection, it must be highlighted that not all paintings that were presented in his home were necessarily works by his own hand. In a letter to Balthasar Gerbier in 1640, Rubens reveals that a painting that had caught the eye of the art connoisseur Edward Norgate when he had visited Rubens's home (and which was now to be sold to King Charles I.) was in fact "*painted entirely by a very mediocre painter of this city (called Verhulst)*", rather than by Rubens himself.[280] The painting had been done after a drawing of a landscape, which Rubens had made when visiting the Escorial during his travels to Spain.[281] Consequently, this exchange of letters explicitly reveals that the presence in Rubens's home cannot guarantee that a painting was single-handedly executed by Rubens himself, even if it was done after one of his drawings.

In summary, these hallmarks lead to the conclusion that some paintings can indeed be categorised as more likely to be single-handed than others, due to their physical characteristics. However, this hardly allows for definite assertions and every painting should be considered on a case-by-case basis. In the spirit of Reinhart Koselleck, even if these aspects cannot tell us whether a painting was done by Rubens, they may well be able to tell us if a painting was definitely *not* done by Rubens. In terms of the autograph "core œuvre" that is crucial for defining the characteristics for single-handed attribution, it should be noted that all evidence points to the fact that the larger part of works originated from a collaborative working process. There is no reliable indication that Rubens would have purposefully created a separate body of autograph paintings. Consequently, any established characteristics should apply to "Rubens" as an enterprise, rather than "Rubens" the individual artist.

280 For a transcript of the whole letter to Balthasar Gerbier, in which the copy in Rubens's collection is discussed, see: Magurn 1955, p. 412.

281 The landscape around the Escorial was painted after Rubens's sketch in numerous versions. See the catalogue essay by Nils Büttner, in: Cat.-Dresden 2016, p. 226.

6. Case Study: Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints

The following chapters aim to show how an actual cluster of preparatory material stands against the previously-discussed comprehensive observations of Rubens's working process. The objective was to illustrate how commissions – or rather the designing of new compositions for a specific location – were handled in Rubens's workshop and thoroughly question the current position, which sees Rubens himself as the sole creator of preparatory material relevant to the creative part of the process. Furthermore, the design process will be reconstructed through close analysis of the works available. In the course of this, the material will be thoroughly examined, as the preserved inventory of works can be deceptive.[282] As a result, the preparatory material will be sorted into a coherent chronological succession.

Unfortunately, Rubens's previously-discussed procedure of creating paintings in several steps – a process that includes at least a preliminary drawing and an oil sketch per painting – is not entirely preserved in most cases. Only in relatively few instances can Rubens's steps be retraced and the altarpiece "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" (Fig. 2) is one of the cases in which both drawings and oils sketches exist in numerous versions. As the title insinuates, the monumental painting on canvas depicts a Madonna with Child, elevated on a pedestal and surrounded by a group of saints. The identities of the depicted saints have been subject to debate, as will be shown in the following chapters. Most commonly they are identified as the following:[283] Saint Peter, Saint Paul and Saint Catherine to the Virgin's right, Saint Joseph and Saint John to her left. The closely-grouped four female saints on the left side of the composition are identified as Clara of Montefalco, Mary Magdalene, Agnes and Apollonia. Saint George, Saint Sebastian and Saint William of Aquitaine occupy the middle foreground and Saint Augustine, Saint Lawrence and Saint Nicholas of Tolentino are depicted on the right bottom side of the composition. The patron of the work is known – namely the Augustinian Eremites – and consequently the painting also classifies as one of Rubens's more prestigious projects.[284] Thanks to this, the commission can be dated very accurately to 1628.

The 1620s were turbulent times for Rubens. The Twelve Years' Truce had expired and during this decade Rubens was very strongly involved with his political career as a diplomat, a prestigious

282 A telling example of how deceiving the preserved canon of works can be is a drawing in the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm, which was considered to be the first drawing for the composition of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" until a further drawing emerged. The work will be discussed in detail in a chapter below.

283 See for instance: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 154; Tieze 2009, p. 345.

284 The details of this commission will be discussed in more detail below.



Fig. 2: Peter Paul Rubens, *Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*, 1628, Oil on canvas, 564 × 401 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

but perhaps not entirely voluntary and joyous occupation. Besides his sojourn in Italy as a young man, he was never away from his hometown more frequently or for longer periods than during this decade. These journeys were nonetheless affiliated with some of the most prestigious commissions of his career and examples include a cycle of 24 paintings for Maria de' Medici, widow of the French king Henry IV. The altarpiece chosen for this case study thus qualifies as a telling example of Rubens's artistic production during the height of his career. When the work was commissioned, Rubens had run his workshop for around twenty years and it is safe to assume that procedures and techniques were well established, to say the least.[285]

6.1. The Commission

In 1625, the provincial chapter of the Augustinian Order officially gathered in Brussels and during the course of this meeting the order officials decided to hold their next gathering in the city of Antwerp, to take place from 13th–21st May 1628.[286] Finishing the interior of the newly-built *Sint Augustinuskerk* – which had only been consecrated in 1618 and dedicated to Our Lady and All Saints – presumably became a priority.[287] One of the key aspects was undoubtedly to adorn the three monumental altars with prestigious altarpieces. The commissions for the side altars went to Jacob Jordaens and Anthonis van Dyck, who were paid 600 Gilders each. Van Dyck depicted "*Saint Augustine in Ecstasy*" and Jacob Jordaens illustrated the "*Martyrdom of Saint Apollonia*". Van Dyck was paid through an endowment of the Augustinian Father Marinus Janssens. These details derive from a history of the Belgian Augustine Eremites by Nikolaus de Tombeur, which was written between 1716 and 1718. The sources on which Nikolaus de Tombeur based his publication are unclear, nor is it known whether they comprised written or oral transmissions.

Rubens was chosen to create a painting for the high altar for the large sum of 3,000 Gilders, which was paid when the finished work was installed in 1628 (Fig. 2).[288] It is often highlighted that Rubens dedicated himself to the project before leaving for Spain on a diplomatic mission.[289]

285 Between 1610 and 1620, Rubens's workshop had produced no less than 60 large format altarpieces. Rubens was consequently well accustomed to this type of commission. See: Baudouin 1972, p. 45ff.

286 Carl van de Velde first noted this based on archival material. See: Van de Velde 1977. See also: Cat.-Antwerp 1977, p. 187; Cat.-Berlin 1978, p. 48; Hubala 1990; Tieze 2009, p. 358.

287 See footnote above.

288 Max Rooses cites a letter from 1764, which refers to the archives of the convent, in which the price of altarpiece is specified as 3,000 fl. See: Rooses 1892, vol. I, p. 287.

289 See for instance: Müller-Hofstede 1969, p. 460.

Given that Rubens left in August – three months after the provincial chapter gathered in Antwerp – his departure does not seem to have influenced the production process of the painting in any way.[290] The monastery was most likely not capable of financing the painting independently and had to rely on a donor or donors. The question of the financial resources is particularly relevant insofar as that it potentially offers clues regarding the depicted subject. For instance, Max Rooses assumes that the saints portrayed were the patron saints of the religious brotherhoods or confraternities based in the *Sint Augustinuskerk*.[291] Generally, depicting their patron saints would only have been feasible if these brotherhoods were also involved in financing the painting. However, this aspect cannot be verified as it is unknown which of the confraternities were based in the church during the time of the altarpiece's commission. Jakob Burckhardt proposes that the high altar contained the relicts of many saints, which determined the painting's subject matter.[292] Michael Jaffé suspects that the sovereign Isabella Clara Eugenia funded the project.[293] In this case, the dedication of the church to "Our Lady and All Saints" would have probably played the most important role.[294] Nico van Hout highlights that the Augustinians in Antwerp were pro-Lutheran during the 16th century, which resulted in their exile in 1527. They only returned to the city at the end of the century, in light of which the presence of "*Augustinian saints among the earliest martyrs* [on the altarpiece] *may have something to do with the order's desire to be identified with the doctrine of the original and 'true' Church of Christ*", according to Van Hout.[295] In other words, the painting's content was a way of emphasising the order's devotion to the Catholic Church. There is indeed a strong focus on martyr saints and the depicted instruments of torture and murder weapons include Saint Paul's sword, Saint Catherine's wheel, Saint Apollonia's pincers, Saint Sebastian's arrows and Saint Lawrence's gridiron. Other attributes indirectly hint towards the saint's martyrdom; for instance, Saint Agnes is depicted with a lamb, which is a reference to her death by the sword of

290 Max Rooses refers to a letter from the 18th century that contains information obtained from the archives of the convent, and suggest an installation in June (see: Rooses 1892, I, p. 287.). However, this seems peculiar considering the gathering of the provincial chapter in May. Nonetheless, the above applies in any case.

291 Rooses writes: "*ce sont les patrons des confréries ayant leur siège dans l'église, qui sont réunis autour du trône de la Vierge*". Unfortunately, there is no evidence to back up this statement. See: Rooses 1892, I, no. 214, p. 285. Julius Held is of the same opinion, and he also links the depicted saints to religious brotherhoods. See: Held 1980, p. 519.

292 See: Burckhardt 1898, p. 182.

293 See: Jaffé 1989, p. 303. Spanish scholars predominantly concur with this theory, see for instance: Lozano López 2015, p. 115.

294 Elizabeth McGrath also highlighted the connection to the circumstance of the church's dedication to the Madonna of Loreto and All Saints. See: McGrath 1992, p. 196.

295 See: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 154.

a roman soldier, who killed her in the same way that lambs were customarily slaughtered. The contemporary viewer would have also known of the violent deaths of other saints, such as Saint Peter, whose attributes do not indicate a saint's martyrdom directly. Balis's and Van Hout's theory of an almost redemptive image content seems plausible, although the other theories can also not be ruled out either.

In any case, Rubens probably received the instruction to depict the Virgin enthroned and surrounded by a group of specific saints, which in turn would most likely have been determined by the commissioner and/or the donor or donors. In this context, Erich Hubala differentiates between *Bildthema* and *ikonographischer Bildgegenstand*, which can be loosely translated into "pictorial theme" and "iconographic pictorial subject".[296] Although the painting's theme is debatable and in this case most probably tied to external factors such as the patron's agenda, the pictorial subject is easily recognisable as a "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*", also referred to as "*Sacra Conversazione*". This was a conventional subject that had been previously illustrated uncountable times during the previous century by famous Italian masters and possible sources of inspiration will be discussed in the following.

When looking at the finished altarpiece, certain influences become apparent even before the preparatory material itself is consulted. For instance, the general composition shows similarities to well-known paintings by Titian or Paolo Veronese depicting the Virgin and Child with saints. Works such as Titian's "*Pesaro Madonna*", Veronese's "*Mystical Marriage of St Catherine*" or Caravaggio's "*Madonna of the Rosary*" (Fig. 3), show certain similarities.[297] The painting by Caravaggio was most certainly known to Rubens, as it was acquired in 1618/19 by an Antwerp consortium to which he belonged.[298] The similarities between Rubens's composition and these cited paintings include the positioning of figures such as the Virgin on an elevated pedestal, and other distinctive compositional elements such as the colossal columns shaping the background or the steps leading into the visual space. For instance, the red drapery in Caravaggio's depiction of the subject – which is hung above the Virgin, loosely wrapped around a column – is found in a comparable way in Rubens's composition.

In other cases, specific figures were repeated.[299] For instance, for the depiction of the monk on the very right of the composition, one of Titian's figures from the so-called "*Gritti-Madonna*"

296 See: Hubala 1990, p. 41–43; For a review of Hubala, see: McGrath 1992, p. 196.

297 Titian's "*Pesaro Madonna*" is on view at its original location, the *Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari*, Venice. The painting by Paolo Veronese is part of the collection of the *Gallerie dell'Accademia* in Venice (cat. no.1324).

298 For more information on the painting by Caravaggio, see: Bischoff 2010.

299 The many sources of inspiration for the specific figures will be discussed in more detail in a chapter below.



Fig. 3: Michelangelo Merisi or Caravaggio, *Madonna of the Rosary ("Rosenkranzmadonna")*, Oil on canvas, 364.5 × 249.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Gemäldegalerie, 147).



Fig. 4: Anthonis van Dyck, *St Bernardino of Siena*, Pen, brown ink, and brown wash on paper, British Museum, London (1957,1214.207.92).

not through one of his own *ricordi*, but rather through a drawing attributed to Anthonis van Dyck (Fig. 4).[300] However, this drawing could not have been done after the original painting, as a fire in the Palazzo Ducale destroyed the work in 1554. Copies such as a woodcut by Niccolò Boldrini, had preserved Titian's design.[301] Another painting that shows compositional similarities as well as inspiration for a specific figure is a "*Madonna and Child with Saint George*" by Correggio. Rubens verifiably came across this painting during his years in Italy, and he made a copy, which is now in the *Graphische Sammlung* of the *Albertina* in Vienna (Fig. 5). Especially the figure of Saint George and the slightly-inclined positioning of the Virgin show a clear reference.

300 The drawing of "*Saint Bernardino of Siena*" by Van Dyck is part of the *British Museum's* collection (1957,1214.207.92).

301 Editions of this print by Boldrini can be found in the British Museum, London (inventory number: 1895,0122.1223) and the *Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston (52.1085).



Fig. 5: Peter Paul Rubens, after Correggio, *Madonna di San Giorgio*, Pen and ink over black chalk, highlighted with white oil paint, 27.3 × 22.2 cm, Albertina, Vienna (8229).



Fig. 6: Peter Paul Rubens, *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, adored by the Saints of the House of Austria*, ca. 1625, Oil on panel, 51.5 × 36.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Gemäldegalerie, 9108).

Works from Rubens's own œuvre also come to mind regarding the composition's general structure, namely the depiction of the Virgin and child elevated in the centre and numerous saints depicted circularly around them. For instance, the oil sketch "*Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, adored by the Saints of the House of Austria*" (Fig. 6) shows a very similar structure of figures, whereby merely the architectural setting is replaced with an accumulation of clouds.[302] It is unclear whether this composition was never painted on a large scale or if a large painting once existed but is lost today. Due to the lack of material, it is difficult to precisely date this oil sketch and consequently it is impossible to determine which of the two compositions preceded which.[303] In any case, it is interesting to note how similar in structure two of Rubens's individual

302 The painting is part of the collection of the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, Vienna, acquired in 1951.

303 The website of the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* dates the work (*"Heilige Anna Selbdritt, verehrt von Heiligen des Hauses Habsburg"*) to around 1625/1628 (see: www.khm.at/de/object/84f0f20482/). For more versions of this composition (for instance, in the *Statens Museum for Kunst*, Copenhagen), see: Jaffé 1985.

compositions were designed. In view of the design process for the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" – which will be discussed in the following – these sources of inspiration are telling insofar as they represent Rubens's creative point of departure.[304] This is especially relevant regarding the aforementioned assertion that Rubens did not make copies. This also applies to the design process and consequently when evaluating drawings and sketches it is beneficial to be aware of the material that was already available in advance. At this point, it can be observed that Rubens's basic composition can hardly be considered a design "made from scratch" in light of the works listed above.

As previously mentioned, a wide variety of preparatory material exists for this particular commission and there are numerous opinions on their chronological order. Interestingly, the authorship of the different works was rarely questioned.[305] The numerous oil sketches were identified as original versions by Rubens's hand as early as the 18th century, and they were considered testimonies to his creative genius.[306] The diverse versions of the composition will be outlined in the following section, along with further figure-specific sources of inspiration.

6.2. Two Preparatory Drawings

Two double-sided drawings can specifically be associated with the composition of the high altar piece of the Augustine Church. The first one is currently in the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm and the drawings on the *recto* – as well as parts of the *verso* – were considered to be the only preparatory drawings for the altarpiece for the most part of the 20th century (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8).[307] This assumption was challenged when a second work was discovered in 2000, which is

304 Compositions that can definitely be dated subsequent to the "*Virgin Enthroned with Child and Saints*" and were influenced by it to some degree include – for instance – "*The Crowning of Saint Catherine*" (c. 1631), which is part of the *Toledo Museum of Art's* collection or "*The Rest on the Flight into Egypt with Saints*" (c. 1632–1635) in the *Museo del Prado*, Madrid.

305 For instance, the oil sketch in the *Städel Museum* in Frankfurt has been attributed to Rubens ever since it was acquired by the museum in 1816. See: Tieze 2009, p. 345ff.

306 For instance, Jean-Baptiste Descamps writes: "*Rubens peignoit l'histoire, le portrait, e paysage, les fruits, les fleurs & les animaux, & dans chaque genre il étoit habile; il avoir tant de ressources dans son génie qu'il a composé jusqu'à trois ou quatre fois le même sujet dans le meme instant, sans qu'il y eut rien de ressemblant. Nous avons plusieurs esquisses de lui, faites pour le même tableau. On en connoît trois en France du tableau d'autel des Augustins d'Anvers, une chez M. de Voyer d'Argenson, l'autre chez M. de Julienne, & la troisième à Rouen, très-finie, chez l'auteur de cet ouvrage. Toutes ces esquisses étaient sur le panneau, la toile ou le papier huilé ; il favoit y répandra la même intelligence que dans un tableau terminé.*". See: Descamps 1753, p. 312–313.

307 See for instance: Bjurström 1955, p. 27; Cat.-Paris 1970, p. 48–49, no. 74; Grossmann 1955, p. 337; Held 1959, I, p. 117 (also mentioned in: Held 1980, I, p. 519); Hubala 1990, p. 19.

now part of the *Metropolitan Museum's* collection in New York.[308] In the context of the "*Madonna Enthroned With Child and Saints*", only one side of the sheet in the *Metropolitan Museum* is relevant, namely the *rectro*, which shows loose drawings that can be associated with the composition (Fig. 19). In the following chapter, these preparatory drawings will be examined and analysed regarding their validity as parts of the design process of the altarpiece. In the case of the drawing in the *Nationalmuseum*, its connection to a painting in the *Royal Collection* in London will also be discussed. This connection offers additional clues regarding the drawing's provenance.

6.2.1. The Stockholm Drawing

The Stockholm drawing was done on paper with black chalk, pen and ink and partially washed with grey and brown.[309] The sheet measures 56.1 × 41.2 cm. Although Rubens commonly used chalk for his drawings and sometimes set accents with ink, the way in which these two materials were used together in this sketch cannot be classified as very typical.[310] The sheet's *recto* side is covered by a drawing of "*Madonna Enthroned with Saints*", which is very clearly connected to the composition found in the finished altarpiece and the corresponding preparatory material (Fig. 7). The *verso* is covered with haphazardly-drawn groups of figures, which partially overlap in some sections (Fig. 8). The top half shows numerous versions of a figure with child, while the figures on the bottom half of the *verso* can be associated with an entirely different composition, namely the "*Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*" in the *Royal Collection* in Buckingham Palace (Fig. 11).[311] The drawing in Stockholm was first mentioned as part of Carl Gustav Tessin's collection in the 1740s. Tessin was a Swedish politician who acquired 2,000 drawings from the previously-mentioned auction of Pierre Crozat's collection when stationed in Paris. This makes it possible – if not likely – that the sheet originated from Rubens's *cantoor*. However, the drawing was considered to be by Anthonis van Dyck after changing the owner in 1741.[312] The *recto* of

308 See: Cat.-New York 2004. However, it is not written off by all scholars. See for instance: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 18.

309 For reasons of simplicity, the sketches will be referred to as the "Stockholm sketch" and the "Metropolitan sketch" or drawing, respectively. The same procedure will be applied to all of the following works.

310 See for instance: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 7, no. 142.

311 See: White 2007; Royal Collection Inventory Number (RCIN): 405356.

312 In his list of purchases from 1741, Carl Gustav Tessin initially had the work recorded as a drawing by Rubens. In the inventory of his collection from 1749, the attribution changed from Rubens to Van Dyck. Cat.-Paris 1970, p. 49.



Fig. 7: Peter Paul Rubens, *La Vierge adorée par des Saints (recto)*, Pen and wash on paper, 56.1 × 41.2 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (NMH 1966/1863).



Fig. 8: Peter Paul Rubens, *La Vierge adorée par des Saints (verso)*, Pen and wash on paper, 56.1 × 41.2 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (NMH 1966/1863).

the drawing is inscribed with "*A. Vandick*" on the bottom left corner and "*Rubbs*" alongside the inventory number "*1773*" on the bottom right.[313] In 1925, Frits Lugt published an article on the sketch, questioning its attribution to Van Dyck and in further consequence it was commonly declared a preparatory drawing for the Saint Augustine Church's altarpiece for the remaining part of the 20th century.[314] Lugt also matched the top of the letter "R" to the inscription found on some drawings in the *Albertina* in Vienna and suspects that Jacques Moermans – who was in charge of the sale of Rubens's drawings in 1657 – inscribed them.[315]

313 These markings were done in pen and brown ink. The two names are written on an attached strip of paper. See: Cat.-Paris 1970, no. 74, p. 48–49.

314 See: Lugt 1925, p. 199ff. Leo van Puyvelde was of a different opinion and regarded it as a: "*Un dessin, d'attribution erronée*". See: Van Puyvelde 1940, p. 83. However, this was not common opinion. In their 2010 publication – for instance – Arnout Balis and Nico van Hout declare the Stockholm sketch as a preliminary design succeeding the initial sketch in the Metropolitan. See: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 18.

315 See: Lugt 1925, p. 200.

This would inherently indicate the drawing was part of Rubens's private collection. However, the letter may well have been recreated to match other inscriptions and consequently any conclusions should be drawn cautiously.

The composition on the *recto* of the sheet shows the most zoomed-in or close-up view of the Madonna enthroned with child and saints (Fig. 7). All other versions of this composition (including the finished altarpiece) show a larger field of view, which is filled with more figures and architectural elements.[316] By implication, few saints are portrayed in the *recto* of the Stockholm drawing, and the group of Virgin, Child and Saint Catherine takes up most of the top half of the sheet. Saint Catherine is depicted kneeling before the Christ child, receiving a ring that symbolises their mystical marriage. In the foreground, only three saints are depicted on the bottom half of the drawing. On the left side, three further saints can be made out on the steps. Above them, on the level of the Virgin, rough drafts of more figures can be made out. The three saints in the foreground are most commonly identified as Saint Sebastian, Saint George and Saint Augustine.[317] It should be noted that the saints in this drawing can only be identified by association with the other versions of this composition; for instance, they are depicted with their attributes in in the finished altarpiece. In the Stockholm drawing, "Saint Augustine" has no flaming heart, "Saint Sebastian's" quiver is replaced by what looks like a slab of wood and "Saint George" is shown without any trace of a dragon. When only looking at the drawing in isolation, the identity of the saints can hardly be determined. This especially applies to the three female saints on the left. Nevertheless, the Stockholm drawing's composition is so similar to the finished altarpiece that it can safely be associated with the composition and the lack of attributes will be discussed in more detail below.

In the Stockholm drawing, the suspected Saint Sebastian and Saint George are positioned slightly differently to any successive version of the composition in oil.[318] Only the other drawing in the *Metropolitan Museum* shows them in a similar pose (Fig. 19). Saint George's face is shown in profile and Sebastian does not turn back and up towards the Virgin Mary, unlike – for instance – in the oil sketch in the *Städel Museum* in Frankfurt (Fig. 20), which is ranked as the next step in the design process and the first version in oil. In the drawings, he gazes to the floor in the direction of the viewer. This is more easily discernible in the Stockholm sketch than in the Metropolitan drawing. His *contrapposto* is very similar to a drawing done after the three-quarter view of a

316 The possible reasons behind the process of simplifying the composition will be discussed in more detail below.

317 See for instance: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 142.

318 Even though the identity of the saints has been questioned, for reasons of simplicity the figures will be referred to as Saint Sebastian and Saint George, respectively.

Hermes statue, which was known as the "*Belvedere Antinous*" during Rubens's lifetime (Fig. 9). A copy after a drawing by Rubens is currently in the *Statens Museum for Kunst* in Copenhagen.[319] The very same antique statue was used as a model numerous times. For instance, both a "*Saint Sebastian*" done in 1614 as well as a depiction of Mercury for the *Torre de la Parada* (Fig. 10) – which was painted around 23 years later – show a clear reference to the statue.[320] This figure was clearly a common and popular part of Rubens's repertoire, as will be shown in a chapter below.

In the Stockholm drawing, the figure of Saint Augustine also shows slight alterations compared to the other, more crowded versions of the composition, and the same can be said for the group of female saints. Here, Augustine's head is shown in profile, whereas he gazes into the viewer's space in all of the oil sketches. The three women on the steps are closer to the oil sketch in the *Städel Museum* in Frankfurt and its pendants, given that the group was extended to four figures in the other versions, such as the *modello* in the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin (Fig. 29). The other female figures behind Saint Catherine – at the height of the Virgin – are only found in this drawing. However, the habit of the figure in the very front is reminiscent of the depiction of Santa Clara of Montefalco in the other versions.

The sheet of the Stockholm sketch has been folded in half, although only the *verso* displays use of the paper's partition (Fig. 8).[321] The upper half shows three different versions of a female figure holding a child on her lap and a few individual figures of infants in different poses. In the two pairs on the right, instead of leaning towards his Mother, the child stretches downwards towards the depiction of a standing infant, which most probably is a representation of the infant Saint John. These postures are by no means first-hand inventions and numerous potential models can be considered; for instance, works such as Raphael's "*Virgin with a Fish*" in the *Museo del Prado*, Titian's "*Madonna of the Cherries*" or his "*A Sacra Conversazione: Madonna and Child with Saints Luke and Catherine of Alexandria*" – which is privately-owned – all show roughly similar depictions of

319 For an illustration, see: Van der Meulen 1968, III, cat. no. 26, fig. 55. The collection of 460 drawings after Rubens in the *Statens Museum for Kunst* will be discussed in more detail below.

320 The painting of "*Saint Sebastian*" is kept in the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin (798H) and the depiction of "*Mercury*" in the *Museo Nacional del Prado* in Madrid (P001677). The two male figures in these paintings – although clearly being derived from the same model – show a slightly different positioning of the legs. This could very well be owed to the fact that Rubens recorded the statue from more than one viewpoint. Seen from the front, the statue's free leg seems almost parallel to its supporting leg. When seen from a viewpoint further to the right, it becomes visible that from the knee down, the free leg sticks out, as recorded in the aforementioned drawing in Copenhagen.

321 On a side note, the folding of the paper and its dimensions correspond with the drawing of "*A Young Man Walking*" in the *Amsterdam Museum* (TA 10299). See for instance: Held 1986, p. 150.



Fig. 9: Unknown (occasionally attributed to Willem Panneels), copy after Rubens, *Hermes Belvedere (Antinous)*, ca. 1628–1630, black chalk and brown ink on paper, 30.9 × 13.7 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.



Fig. 10: Workshop of Peter Paul Rubens, *Mercury (Torre de la Parada)*, 1636–1638, Oil on canvas, 180 × 69 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid (P001677).

the Virgin and Child, or certain corresponding elements.[322] Of course, it cannot be said whether Rubens saw these exact paintings, but the inspiration from similar compositions of these eminent Italian artists cannot be denied. In terms of the sheet showing several similar figures next to each other, Raphael's numerous *Madonna Studies* could well have been exemplary.[323] Rubens had previously made use of this kind of composition: the positioning of the mother and child at the very left of the composition bears resemblance to his painting of the "*Holy Family*", which was engraved by Lucas Vorsterman in 1620.[324]

The standing figure (presumably of the infant Saint John) on the *verso* of the Stockholm drawing is also found on the *recto*, as one of the putti in front of the Virgin's pedestal (Fig. 7). It resembles the depiction of Saint John in other paintings by Rubens, most famously in "*The Holy Family under an Apple Tree*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna.[325] The solitary infant in the bottom left corner of the top half of the Stockholm drawing's *verso* shows the same bent position in which the infant Jesus is depicted on the *recto*. This is also the position in which the Christ child is depicted in all versions of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" composition, including the finished altarpiece (Fig. 2).

The lower half of the *verso* (Fig. 8) is comparatively empty and the drawing cannot be connected to the composition of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*". The same piece of paper was consequently re-used for more than one purpose, a material-saving practice common to Rubens's drawing œuvre.[326] At the very bottom of the page, the figure of a woman on her knees can be made out very clearly, but the rest of the section only shows feeble lines. A man on horseback and two standing female figures in elaborate dresses can be identified. The right of the two figures has a child carrying the train of her dress. On the very right edge of the sheet, architectural elements can be made out. The figures and shapes depicted in this part of the drawing can be connected to a painting of a landscape with Saint George, which is part of the *Royal Collection* in Buckingham

322 For an illustration of Raphael's "*Virgin with a Fish*" (or "*The Holy Family with Raphael, Tobias and Saint Jerome*", *Museo Nacional del Prado*, P000297) see most recently: Marshall 2016, p. 237. The "*Madonna of the Cherries*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* has the inventory number "Gemäldegalerie, 118". The privately-owned painting by Titian entered a private collection at a Sotheby's sale of Old Master works in New York on 27th January 2011.

323 See: Cat.-Vienna 2017a.

324 The painting of the "*Holy Family*" is at the *Chicago Art Institute* (Major Acquisitions Fund, 1967.229). An edition of the print by Vorsterman ("*Heilige Familie met Elisabet en Johannes de Doper als kind*") can be found in the *Rijksmuseum* in Amsterdam (inv. no. RP-P-OB-33.026).

325 The painting of "*The Holy Family under an Apple Tree*" in the *KHM* (inv. no. 698) used to be divided and installed on the outer wings of the *Ildefonso* altarpiece, before the panels were joined together.

326 See – for instance – the sketch in the *Metropolitan Museum*, which will be discussed in the following chapter.



Fig. 11: Peter Paul Rubens, *Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*, 1629–1630, Oil on canvas, 152.5 × 226.9 cm, Royal Collection, London (RCIN 405356).

Palace (Fig. 11). The man on horseback resembles a squire in the right foreground of the painting. The woman on her knees is also featured prominently in the front part of the composition and the standing woman in the middle of the drawing – whose train is held by a child – corresponds with the princess, although the child is not depicted in the painting and the train of her dress lies on the ground.[327] The lines are too feeble to tell for certain, but the architectural elements in the

327 The depiction of the train held by a child reminds of a figure in a drawing after the tournament book of King René in the *Kupferstichkabinett* in Berlin (Mielke/Winner 1977, p. 94, no. 34). The figure in the Stockholm drawing is not worked out to such a degree that a direct comparison can be made, although it is not unlikely that this kind of illustration served as inspiration. The drawing "*A Knight and a Lady*" after the 15th-century engraving by Israhel van Meckenem of the same name also comes to mind (*Kupferstichkabinett*, Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 74, no. 6). Whether Rubens himself made the copy of the tournament book has been questioned and cannot be answered here, yet the fact that in 1620 his at soon-to-be close friend Fabri de Peiresc was working on a restrike print – only two years before Rubens himself travelled to Paris – makes it very likely that Rubens knew the book. A very similar figure also appears in other works such as the drawing for "*The Continence of Scipio*" in the *Musée Bonnat*, Bayonne (Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 139, fig. 75). The female figure found on the right very edge of the drawing of "*The Miracle of the Lame Man Healed by Saint Peter and Saint John*" (*National Gallery of Art*, Washington, DC) also comes to mind as a possible source of inspiration (see: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 155). Again, at this point questions of attribution regarding this particular sketch shall remain open. However, overall it can be said that this figure was part of Rubens's repertoire.

drawing seem to correlate with the buildings in the background of the painted landscape. The painting "*Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*" was done on canvas and presumably started during Rubens's stay in England during 1629 and 1630, and later taken home to Antwerp (Fig. 11). In a letter from Joseph Mead – an English scholar – to his friend and cousin Sir Martin Stuteville, a painting of "*the History of St George*" is mentioned, which Rubens allegedly sent home to Flanders to "*remain there as a monument of his abode & employment*" in England.[328] It is impossible to know whether the painting to which Meade refers is indeed the same painting that is part of the *Royal Collection* today, although it seems likely given the painting's origination process, which will be discussed in more detail in the following. The work supposedly found its way back to London during Rubens's lifetime: Endymion Porter – an English diplomat – is said to have acquired the painting on his mission to the Spanish Netherlands in 1634–1635, and subsequently resold it to Charles I.[329]

The painting shows irregularities of the paint's surface in many places, especially the outer sections, which suggests that the work was not done cohesively or altered during the painting process. An x-ray image of the painting confirms this: the painting was not finished in one go, but significantly enlarged at a later point. Two rectangular strips on the outer right and the bottom of the central section show a different underground, suggesting that that the canvas was enlarged in more than one step.[330] The bottom and the right strip were most likely attached first. Rubens did not stay in England for a very long time period, so it might reasonably be assumed that the enlargement was done in Rubens's studio back in Antwerp. The strong similarity between the trees depicted in the painting and Rubens's drawings done after nature is an indication that the canvas was enlarged by Rubens or his workshop, and that this was done in Antwerp rather than London. Drawings like the "*Woodland Scene*" in *The Ashmolean Museum* in Oxford come to mind (Fig. 12).[331] This specific woodland scene was presumably done near the village of Elewijt. Only a member of the workshop or Rubens himself could have had access to sketches such as this one, and consequently it is unlikely that the trees – which were done in the context of the enlargement – were painted in England.

On the left, the central composition initially ended behind the woman who has both of her arms raised in distress (for an image of the central piece of canvas, see: Fig. 13). The seam on the

328 See: White 2007, p. 8–9.

329 For an account of the painting's full provenance, see: White 2007, p. 216–217.

330 For a detailed account of how all nine pieces of canvas were joined together, see: White 2007, p. 219ff.

331 The drawing is pictured in: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 286, no. 105.



Fig. 12: Peter Paul Rubens, *Woodland Scene*, 1635–1638, Black, red and white chalk, white gouache on paper, 38.3 × 49.9 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (WA 1855.122).



Fig. 13: Edited version of: Peter Paul Rubens, *Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon,* 1629–1630, Oil on canvas, 152.5 × 226.9 cm, Royal Collection, London (RCIN 405356).

right goes through the brown horse's neck, not fully including the squire's head. The top of the painting just included the two putti, not the tip of the martyr's palm, and the bottom line ran above the heads of the naked children. Per Bjurström has shown that the left of the two female figures found on the Stockholm drawing was initially also part of the painting: the figure was originally depicted above the kneeling woman in the left middle ground of the painting, in the spot that now shows two long trees (see: Fig. 14). She was later painted over, most likely in the process of the painting's extension.[332] In contrast to the drawing, she seems to have been accompanied by the figure of a child to her feet in the painting. However, the lower half of the Stockholm drawing is not the only drawing that can be associated with the "*Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*". To make matters even more complicated, two more drawings in the *Kupferstichkabinett* in Berlin also show the key figures of this composition.[333] The first drawing shows a detailed study of the

332 The changes can be made out with the naked eye and the exact figure comes to light in more detail in the x-ray photograph. See: Bjurström 1955, p. 34/43; White 2007, p. 220. Painting over compositions and consequently significantly altering them is not unusual in Rubens's practice and cannot be accredited to workshop practises. For instance, the very personal portrait of his second wife, "*Het Pelsken*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Musuem* (Gemäldegalerie, 688) initially showed a fountain and a statue. By painting over this part of the painting Rubens significantly altered the painting's formal appearance as well as its message. For an in-depth study of "*Het Pelsken*" by Katlijne van der Stighelen, Geert van der Snickt, Gerlinde Gruber and Koen Janssens, see: Cat.-Antwerp 2015, p. 76–97.

333 See: Mielke/Winner 1977, no. 33/no. 35r; Held 1959, I, p. 117.



Fig. 14: Detail of X-ray photograph of: Peter Paul Rubens, *Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*, 1629–1630, Oil on canvas, 152.5 × 226.9 cm, Royal Collection, London (RCIN 405356).



Fig. 15: Peter Paul Rubens, *Woman from the Back*, 1629–1630, Black chalk heightened with white, 39.4 × 22.6 cm, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin (3236).

same figure of the standing woman that was later painted over with trees (Fig. 15).[334] The second sheet shows numerous figures found on the right side of the painting: the squire on horseback, two versions of the second horse, alongside sketches of the figures found in the trees above them (Fig. 16). These drawings raise the question of the Stockholm drawing's role in the development of this composition, bearing in mind that the sheet's *recto* prominently features the composition "*Virgin Enthroned with Saints*".

334 The drawing is generally associated with *"The Garden of Love"*, which is not very plausible, as the figure is clearly identical to the woman in the *"Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon"*. Held even points out that her collar resembles that of a *"Portrait of a Young Girl"* (*Hermitage*, Leningrad), who is generally assumed to be the daughter of Balthasar Gerbier, Rubens's host during his time in England. See: Held 1986, p. 139, Nr. 178. Held proposes that both drawings portray Gerbier's wife – Deborah Kip (who was only 28 years old in 1629) – but he does not make the connection to the woman depicted in *"Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon"*.



Fig. 16: Peter Paul Rubens, *Studies for Saint George and the Princess*, ca. 1629, Black and red chalk on paper, washed with ink, 34.8 × 49.6 cm, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin (3997).

Per Bjurström – who did not know of the *Metropolitan* drawing's existence – assumes that the Stockholm sheet was initially used to make the preparatory sketches for the altarpiece of the Augustine Church, and subsequently brought on the journey to England.[335] There, the bottom half of the *verso* (Fig. 8) was used to make preliminary sketches for the painting "*Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*".[336] He bases this premise on the theory that although the painting was enlarged on all four sides, the strips on the right and the bottom were attached from the very outset.[337] The fact that the central piece of canvas shows signs of being attached to a stretcher makes

335 Julius Held agrees with this theory of Rubens having carried his sketchbook to London, but he does not consider it likely that Rubens subsequently took it to Spain. Unfortunately, Held does not give the reason for his opinion. Held 1959, II, p. 117.

336 In his opinion, the drawing in the *Kupferstichkabinett*, showing the horses, represents an additional preliminary drawing (he doesn't mention the second drawing in the *Kupferstichkabinett* of the standing woman). Bjurström 1955, p. 39.

337 Bjurström proposes that the figure – which depicts a squire in the finished painting – was originally Saint George himself, and that the place – which is now occupied with corpses – initially bore the dragon. Consequently, the drawings in the *Kupferstichkabinett* and in Stockholm represent preliminary designs for the initial version of the painting. According to his theory, the painting was later radically changed to show a new Saint George in the middle of the composition, turning his old depiction into the squire. Bjurström proposes these changes were made due to the fact that Rubens decided to gift the painting to Charles I. The catalogue of the King's collection – which indicates that Charles I bought the painting from Endymion Porter – should not be taken "too seriously". See: Bjurström 1955.

this unlikely.[338] If the first stage of the painting's execution indeed only comprised the central section, only one of the three drawings can be associated with this first step, namely the sketch of the standing woman in the *Kupferstichkabinett* (Fig. 15). The other two drawings (Fig. 16 and Fig. 8) must be placed in the context of the subsequent enlargement in Antwerp, as they include figures that were not part of the painting from the very outset: the second *Kupferstichkabinett* drawing only shows figures and animals found on the enlargement on the bottom and the right side, presumably the first stage of the expansion. The Stockholm sketch is distinguished by the fact that it shows elements from all three stages, namely figures done after the first expansion (i.e. the woman on her knees and the squire), the second expansion (the architectural elements) as well as the initial composition (the two women in elaborate dress).

There is no reason to believe that the elements of the Stockholm drawing were executed at various points in time. Given that the first two stages of "*Saint George and the Dragon*" were most likely done in two different countries, this makes it very unlikely that this drawing shows preliminary sketches for three steps, especially given that the drawing in question only shows a total of four figures. All things considered, the person who made the drawing must have seen the painting after its first expansion, but before the standing woman was painted over. This would presuppose that the figure was covered up during – or after – the second enlargement, not the first. Either the painting once showed all four figures simultaneously or the maker of the drawing was present at the time of the second alteration. Theoretically, the drawing could have even been done after another unknown copy of the painting, and not the painting itself.

In any case, given that the bottom half of the Stockholm drawing can be ruled out as a preliminary design, it is most probably a recollection done by a member of Rubens's workshop.[339] The two drawings in the *Kupferstichkabinett* further encourage this theory, seeing as it is very unlikely that Rubens drew more than one version of the exact same figure and both the squire and the standing woman are depicted recurrently.[340] Contrary to the popular belief that Rubens was cautious with sharing his designs, countless reproductions of preliminary material testify to a fair amount of copying activity in his studio.

338 According to Christopher White, there is evidence of a tacking edge: White 2007, p. 119. Apart from this, there is no conceivable reason for Rubens to take a piece of paper with him to England, of which only one quarter remained blank for further drawings.

339 For a further observation regarding this drawing's intended purpose see the chapter on the adaptations of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" subject below.

340 This is not to say that the attribution to Rubens should not also be questioned in these two cases.



Fig. 17: Jean Charles Levasseur after David Teniers the Younger, *Saint George*, 18th Century, Engraving, 35.3 × 42 cm, The British Museum, London (1877,0811.673).

When looking at compositions such as "*Saint George*" by David Teniers the Younger, it becomes apparent how much influence Rubens's designs had on fellow artists: parts of Rubens's composition were copied in detail and pieced together to form a slightly different, new composition (see: Fig. 17).[341]

The consistent use of the same material and drawing style on both sides of the Stockholm drawing indicates that a single person was responsible for both sides of the sheet. If a member of the workshop was responsible for the verso, this suggests that the *recto* shows a workshop copy, in which the artist took certain creative liberties, not unlike Teniers did with "*Saint George*".[342] This was by no means unusual or a practice exclusive to David Teniers. For instance, when looking at Van Dyck's drawings, one comes across a number of tweaked compositions by Rubens. Depicting the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus was a rather common subject and recording variations – as can be found on this particular drawing – was certainly useful to any fellow artist. This copying activity should not be misunderstood as something that only students or lesser artists would condescend to do.

341 The painting by Teniers is lost, but was reproduced in a print by Jean Charles Levasseur.

342 It is difficult to determine when this drawing was made exactly, but if Endymion Porter took this particular painting of Saint George and the dragon back to London it must have been before 1635.



Fig. 18: Peter Paul Rubens, *Study of the Torso Belvedere (verso)/The Virgin Adored by Saints*, 1601–1602, Red chalk on paper, 26 × 39.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2002.12a).

After all, Rubens himself was no stranger to tweaking compositions by his great idols such as Titian or Raphael. In summary, the Stockholm drawing can in all liklehood not be categorized into the design process of the altarpiece, but shows a *ricordo* by a fellow artist closely affiliated with Rubens's studio.

6.2.2. The Drawing in the Metropolitan Museum

The second sketch was discovered in 2000 and purchased shortly afterwards by the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York (Fig. 18 and Fig. 19). During most of the 20th century, the sketch in the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm had been thought of as the preparatory drawing, notwithstanding all arguments discussed in the chapter above. This changed when this new sheet surfaced.[343] The *recto* of this newly-discovered drawing is now almost universally accepted as Rubens's first thoughts on the subject of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*".[344] This is not surprising as in respect to the techniques used, the Metropolitan sheet is much more convincing as a drawing done by Rubens, as both of its sides show drawing techniques that are

343 This is not a great testimony to connoisseurship and a clear example of how a drawing was made to fit the process even though it did not necessarily fit the profile of a Rubens-sketch. The goal should be to determine, whether a drawing can stylistically be accepted into the œuvre, irrespective of how conveniently the image content fits into a chain of preparatory material.

344 See for instance: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 142.



Fig. 19: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Virgin Adored by Saints (recto)/Study of the Torso Belvedere*, Pen and brown ink on paper, 39.5 × 26 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2002.12b).

well known and accepted within Rubens's œuvre of drawings. The *verso* shows a typical *ricordo* of a back view of the *Torso of Belvedere* in red chalk, while its *recto* is covered with characteristic loose sketches called *crabbelingen* done in pen and brown ink. The paper measures 39.5 × 26 cm.

The *ricordo* (Fig. 18) was presumably done during Rubens's stay in Rome during 1601 and 1602 and is not the only recording of this statue ascribed to Rubens. There are numerous drawings of this famous antique, from various different angles. In the right bottom half of the sheet, Rubens's initials "*PPR*" are inscribed twice, once in red and once in black chalk. Anne-Marie Logan highlights, that this careful red chalk study might have been the sheet's salvation, since it held more value than the *crabbeling* on its other side.[345]

The *recto* of the sheet (Fig. 19) is also marked, this time with the artist's full last name, "*P Rubens*". However, the presence of Rubens's name or initials cannot be seen as evidence of his hand as these inscriptions were generally added to drawings after his death. The *recto* shows Rubens's first drafts, a multitude of configurations that he brought to paper through imprecise, spontaneous but bold strokes. Three areas stand out due to stronger strokes: a cloaked figure at the top left corner, two figures cradling an infant in the top right and the figures of Saint Sebastian and Saint George to the bottom right of the sheet. The middle of the sheet is covered with further figures. Done in feeble, minimalistic strokes, they most likely depict saints and in one case the Virgin. This technique is not entirely different to the numerous depictions of the virgin holding the baby Jesus on her lap in the top half of the *verso* of the Stockholm drawing discussed earlier.[346] It should be noted that although this technique was characteristic to Rubens, it was by no means a manner of drawing exclusive to him. For instance, in the œuvre of Van Dyck's – an artist who is most closely associated with Rubens – several drawings show the same type of rudimentary sketching.

This sketch is firmly believed to be a preparatory sketch for the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" primarily due to the two figures of Saint Sebastian and Saint George. The two figures are not arranged in a coherent composition in this drawing, which is discernible from the counterintuitive orientation of the figures. Saint Sebastian and Saint George both look towards their left, into nothingness, since they are placed at the right edge of the sheet. Rubens must have anticipated their future placement on the left side of his composition. The group of figures on the top right part of the sheet – showing two figures cradling a child – does not bear any similarity to the finished composition. To their left, in the middle of the sheet a solitary figure

345 See: Logan 2007, p. 169.

346 The aspect of this work that is perhaps the least characteristic of Rubens is the additional use of wash applied with a brush.

with a child in its lap is depicted, although the child's pose is also very different to the one found in the finished work. Rubens's œuvre contains a number of works showing the Virgin with child or the Holy Family and consequently these drawings could theoretically be associated with other works. The same is true for the other figures. None of them were re-used or further developed in the following material for the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*". Anne-Marie Logan identified the cloaked figure in the top left corner as a depiction of Saint Catherine.[347] However, the lacking feminine character of the figure makes this seem rather questionable. In subsequent versions of the composition, Saint Catherine is depicted in a contemporary-fitted dress, which is very different to the cloaked figure. It might at best have been a preparatory version of the figure of Saint Augustine.

In conclusion, the sketch would not have had a purpose for developing the composition, apart for the figures of Saint Sebastian and Saint George. None of the other figures can be recognised in this preliminary sketch. Nevertheless, Saint Sebastian and Saint George take up a central space in the following composition and since the *crabbelingen* were most likely jotted down in mere minutes, the sketch can nonetheless be seen as a productive – if rudimentary – element of the design process.

6.3. The Oil Sketch in the Städel Museum and its Twins

A hitherto-undisputed part of the creative process for the altarpiece is the oil sketch currently in the *Städel Museum* in Frankfurt (Fig. 20). The oil sketch is generally seen as the composition preceding the modello in the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin, as a "first version", so to speak. Moyaux and Oldenburg suggested that the sketch in Frankfurt shows a preliminary stage of the composition's design process, a theory that is still generally accepted in Rubens's scholarship.[348] However, it is important to highlight that including the Frankfurt sketch in the design process for the Augustine Church's altarpiece is mostly based on compositional similarities, and less on the belief that the oil sketch fills the void of an integral and irreplaceable step in the design process. In other words, particularly due to the existence of the sketch in Berlin, the development of the composition is theoretically plausible without including the Frankfurt sketch.

The design prominently features fundamental elements of the finished altarpiece: the Virgin Mary thrones on top of a pedestal, surrounded by twelve Saints. The architectural base resembles

347 See: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 140.

348 See: Tieze 2009, p. 349.



Fig. 20: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine*, 1628, Oil on panel, 64.2 × 49 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt (464).

the front view of the two pedestals for the statues of the *Dioscuri*, atop the steps leading up to the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome, which were designed by Michelangelo. Rubens must have made drawings of them during his stay in Italy. On the Virgin's lap, the Infant Jesus leans towards Saint Catherine, who is positioned closest to the pair, kneeling to their right at a slight angle, showing her right side to the viewer. This prominent positioning of Saint Catherine is the reason why this particular sketch in Frankfurt was named "*The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine*" instead of "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*".[349] Saint John – ascending the steps with a declamatory gesture – and the saints Peter and Paul – who are positioned in the shadow of a large column at the left side of the composition – flank this central group.[350] Compared to the finished altarpiece (and the sketch in Berlin), this sketch shows a slightly less harmonious configuration of figures in front of the architectural element: In the composition's foreground, eight saints are positioned on steps, roughly divided into three groups. They are usually identified as Saint Agnes, Saint Apollonia and Clara of Montefalco on the very left, Saint Sebastian and Saint George in the middle foreground, and Saint Augustine, Saint Lawrence with Nicholas of Tolentino on the right.[351] Especially with the female Saints and the monk to the very right, only the finished altarpiece offers the key clues to their identity, as the oil sketch oddly only depicts a few of the saints with their attributes.[352] It is difficult to determine the exact number of saints with and without attributes, as the question of what qualifies as an attribute cannot be answered definitely. For instance, in the case of Mary Magdalene, the identification is primarily based on her pained expression. The four female figures could consequently more or less depict any female saint at this stage.

The Frankfurt sketch is not the only version of this exact composition. Four more, almost identical versions in oil are known. One is in the collection of the *Salzburg Museum* (Fig. 23), and three more in private collections (Fig. 24; Fig. 25). However, due to its high-ranking custodian, the sketch in Frankfurt was an object of more research than its counterparts. The wood panel of the Frankfurt sketch measures 64.2 × 49 cm. This was a standard format and the fact that the back

349 Since 1892, the sketch has been listed in the *Städel's* inventory as "*The Engagement or The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine*" (with the exception of Heinrich Weizsäcker's time as the museum's director). Leo van Puyvelde – who found this title somewhat misleading – criticized this, considering "*Mary with Child and Saints*" to be more appropriate. See: Tieze 2009, p. 348–349.

350 The figure of Saint Peter is similar to (and perhaps inspired by) a depiction of the same saint in a drawing after Parmigianino and Raphael in the *National Gallery of Art* in Washington, DC (see: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 155). Saint John's gesture has been interpreted as a reference towards the heavenly origin of Christ. See: Cat.-Berlin 1978, p. 48.

351 It was Max Rooses who identified the monk as Nicholas of Tolentino. In the *Städel's* inventory he was described as Francis of Assisi until 1924 (with the exception of a short period during Heinrich Weizsäcker's time as the museum's director). See: Tieze 2009, p. 348.

352 This matter will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on saints.



Fig. 21: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine (verso: Two Equestrian Battles)*, 1628, Oil on panel, 49 × 64.2 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt (464).

does not show a branding indicates that the panel was bought directly from the panel maker and had not passed a guild examination prior to that.[353] The panel shows a number of vertical fissures and a large tear across the longitudinal line called for a reinforcement in the form of a strip of wood glued over the defect to prevent further cracking. This defect gives rise to the assumption that this panel was not of the greatest quality, but rather a low-cost version. Unfortunately, this reinforcing strip covers part of the drawing on the reverse side, which constitutes a design for the cycle for Henry IV of France with allegorical framework, a commission that was never completed (Fig. 21). The panel itself has been subject to a dendrochronological examination by Peter Klein, who estimates that the panel was cut in 1628 and painted no earlier than 1630, given that the youngest heartwood ring dates from 1613.[354] This stands in opposition to the verifiable date of the altarpiece's completion in 1628, although the dendrochronological examination is based on estimates and cannot offer absolute certainty; for instance the defects of the panel could indicate insufficient drying time. Consequently, the sketch can by no means be ruled out of the design process on these grounds.

353 Although it is off by a few centimetres, this format is most probably the standard size called "*salvators*" size, named after the coin stamped with that image. According to Jørgen Wadum, this format measures 50 × 60 cm. The previously mentioned regulations for panel makers that were laid down in 1617 also stipulated that panels should be modelled after templates kept at the guild office. See: Wadum 2007, p. 182.

354 Dendrochronological examinations calculate the most likely point in time by considering factors such as drying time. With the youngest heartwood ring dating from 1613, Klein suggests a felling date of around 1626/1628/1632. The final estimation includes additional drying time. See: Tieze 2009, II, p. 735. For instanxe, Jørgen Wadum suggests that the average seasoning period was around two to five years during the 16th and 17th centuries, see: Wadum 1995, p. 154. Of course, this can only ever be a rough guideline.

The oil sketches painting technique is typical for Rubens's œuvre. The panel's top was first primed with a chalk-glue ground. This created an even surface, on top of which a greyish *imprimatura* was applied. The coarsely-applied *imprimatura* is still very visible to the naked eye, as it was not covered but incorporated into the composition. This gives the sketch an ochre hue, which could be a sign of age as the *imprimatura* can darken with time.[355] When it was initially done, the sketch might have appeared a little fresher and whiter.

Along the outer edges of the panel, the sketch shows thin regular marks, done in a brownish very thin line. The marks are especially distinct along the bottom edge: two different intervals are discernible, one of which is marked with the numbers one to twelve, counting up from the right to the left side of the panel. These markings form a grid when connected, which is a classic aid for an artist when making a copy of any composition. Working with a grid seems to have occasionally been part of Rubens's technique. The preliminary drawing for "*The Baptism of Christ*" in the *Musée du Louvre* is attributed to Rubens and shows an actual grid drawn over the whole composition.[356] However, this type of precise drawing – which Anne-Marie Logan refers to as *cartonetto* – is an exception in Rubens's œuvre and consequently although it serves as a telling example of Rubens's previous use of a grid, it does not provide an indication of Rubens's standard process. As will be shown, among all of the oil sketches associated with the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" composition, this is not the only work that shows markings. The other examples – including the oil sketch in the *Salzburg Museum* – will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

The sketch shows significant changes that were made during the painting process. Some can be guessed at, although the full extent comes to light when looking at the infrared reflectography. For instance, in the finished sketch Saint Sebastian's lower body faces the viewer, his torso is slightly turned, and his head faces the Virgin behind him. The infrared reflectography shows that he was initially placed around 3 cm further to the middle of the composition, while his torso was slightly more rounded and bent towards the viewer (see Fig. 22). These changes are easily detectible given that the flesh colour contains white lead. Pieces of armour previously lay on the floor to Saint Sebastian's right, and Saint George had his left hand placed on a shield, which stood on the steps next to him and was later retouched. Altogether, the former version of the two saints seems to have had strong similarities to the oil sketch "*Saint Sebastian and Saint George*" in the *Musée des Beaux Arts* in Caen (Fig. 28). Another part of the sketch that shows changes in the painting process is the head of the left of the two putti dotingly leading a lamb up the

355 A darkening effect can occur due to an increased transparency of the white lead component. See for instance: Noble/van Loon/Boon 2005.

356 See: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 93–95.



Fig. 22: IRR Detail + Detail of: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine, 1628*, Oil on panel, 64.2 × 49 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt (464).

steps towards the virgin. It should be noted that in this sketch the lamb resembles a white sheep dog more than an actual lamb. The animals in Rubens's works are usually done with a lot of care and in some cases Rubens partnered with artists such as Frans Snyders, who was an expert in this subject. It is difficult to imagine that the kind of "lamb" pictured in this oil sketch would have made it on to the finished altarpiece. The whole section around the putti and the animal is rather unclear in the IRR, although the spotty appearance of the space between the virgin's shawl and the current head of the putto either indicates its previous positioning further to the middle of the composition or a simple correction in posture.

In addition to these very obvious changes, there are numerous smaller alterations that are more difficult to detect but become visible through either IRR or X-ray. This primarily concerns small changes to the saints' attributes. For instance, a lighter spot appears to the right of the spiral of Saint Augustine's crozier, which could indicate that the spiral was once turned clockwise and

altered at a later date. Although this is hardly noticeable, it is a rather odd correction considering the staff's position in the sketch in the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin (Fig. 29): in this sketch and some other versions such as the copy in the *Museum of Fine Arts* in Boston (Fig. 30), the spiral turns to the right. Furthermore, there is a small shadow between the fingers of Saint Augustine's left hand, which could indicate that he initially held something in his hand.[357] A second lighter spot can be detected above Saint George's shield. With the naked eye, this spot is invisible due to a strange brown object, which is painted over this exact point (see: Fig. 20). It oddly resembles the end of a bushy tail, much like the tail of a lion. An object seems to have previously been placed in the hands of the figures that have been identified as Saint Agnes and Saint Apollonia, roughly resembling the fragment of a chain. These numerous corrections to the composition suggest that this sketch was not a copy after a model. When done after a specific model, there is no conceivable reason for a work to show *pentimenti*. Consequently, the Frankfurt sketch can only be the first version of this specific composition and in turn it must have served as the model for the other oil sketches, such as the one in Salzburg. The Frankfurt sketch's role in the creative process of the altarpiece will be discussed in the following.

6.3.1. The Frankfurt Sketch's Intended Purpose

Generally, the Frankfurt sketch (Fig. 20) is categorised as the first of two preparatory oil sketches. It is followed by the oil sketch presently in the *Gemäldegalerie*, *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*, which is also referred to as a *modello* and will be discussed in further detail below (Fig. 29).[358] The making of a second oil sketch would imply that there was ample reason to change the first composition. Usually it is assumed that it was the patrons who requested the alterations: in this scenario, Rubens presented the initial composition to his patrons in the form of the Frankfurt sketch, but meanwhile they had changed their mind regarding the painting's content. Subsequently, Rubens worked their wishes into the second oil sketch. The common explanation for the significant changes in the depiction of Saint Sebastian and Saint George is the change in compositional space due to the additional figures: by altering Saint Sebastian and Saint George, Rubens made space for the rear-view figure behind them, who is commonly identified as

357 The issue of the crozier and the object in his hand will be discussed in more detail in the chapter below dedicated to the depiction of the saints.

358 The inventory number of the oil sketch in Berlin is no. 780 and for an illustration see: Cat.-Cincinnati 2004, p. 32.

Saint William of Aquitaine.[359] A possible reason for the need for additional saints could have been the involvement of further donors, who wanted their patron saints represented on the altarpiece. However, there is no proof for this. For instance, Michael Jaffe suspects that the sovereign Isabella Clara Eugenia solely financed the project.[360] If this was the case, it can be assumed that the content was final before Rubens set to work. Consequently, the alteration of the composition must have either had other reasons or the chronological sequence of the two oil sketches must be reconsidered.

When comparing the two oil sketches in Frankfurt and Berlin, it can immediately be seen that they significantly differ in refinement: while the Frankfurt sketch still shows signs of the working process such as the scribbling above Peter and Paul or the numbers alongside the bottom of the panel, the Berlin *modello* is much more refined and resembles a small finished painting.[361] Furthermore, the faces of the figures in the Frankfurt sketch are not worked out to a satisfactory degree and the colours – for instance, in the Virgin's blue shawl – seem much less vibrant.[362] This difference in execution and refinement would generally suggest a different intended use: the Frankfurt sketch is not worked out to a degree that would suggest it was showed to important patrons. If the same reduced composition found in the Frankfurt sketch was indeed shown to representatives of the order as a first proposition, one might assume that a more polished and worked-out sketch of that same composition existed at one point but is lost today. However, the question remains open why Rubens would have made a second, well-worked-out copy and not simply elaborated the Frankfurt sketch.[363]

359 See: Hubala 1990, p. 30; Tieze 2009, p. 360.

360 See: Jaffé 1989, p. 303. This stands in contrast to Max Rooses's opinion. As previously mentioned, he stated that the depicted saints were the patron saints of the religious brotherhoods, which were based in the church, which would indicate they were also the donors. See: Rooses 1892, I, no. 214, p. 285. However, there is no way of knowing the exact number or identity of these religious brotherhoods, so this is presumably a guess at best.

361 The unidentifiable words above the two saints' heads are not scratched into the wet paint, as was sometimes Rubens's practice, but applied with paint. What the fact that it is worked out to a further degree means for the *modello* in Berlin in terms of its purpose will be discussed in more detail below.

362 Although the vibrancy of colours can also be lost due to bad conservation, pale tones could also indicate the use of cheaper pigments.

363 The patrons wanting to keep the oil sketch could have been a possible reason for making two copies, as Rubens would have wanted to ensure one copy stayed in his possession. However, as will be shown, numerous copies of the Frankfurt sketch exist and consequently this seems very unlikely.

If Rubens had wanted to show the Frankfurt sketch to patrons, he could have simply worked out this sketch a little further and painted over the scribbles. However, as mentioned above, it seems unlikely that Rubens would have shown the sketch to important patrons in its present, incomplete condition.[364]

It must be remembered that the whole theory of two sequential oil sketches only emerged because the two works in Frankfurt and Berlin exist, and their presence has to be explained in some way. Although the theory of additional saints – which had to be added retroactively due to the patron's wishes – is possible, it was not usually Rubens's course of action to make two oil sketches for one composition. For this reason, other possibilities should be explored.

Theoretically, the Frankfurt sketch could have been the Rubens's initial version, whereby halfway through the painting process he was dissatisfied and abandoned the composition for the benefit of the more crowded second version. However, this would imply that the additional saints were only added for compositional reasons and based on Rubens's own initiative. One would assume that the Augustinian Eremites had certain ideas concerning the image content of their high altar piece. Supposing that the order gave full and specific instructions concerning the saints that they wished to see on the painting when initially commissioning the work, what would the modified composition of the Frankfurt sketch represent? In this case, the Frankfurt sketch could only show a composition not directly related to the altarpiece. This is a theory that can hardly be proven, although the same can be said for the categorisation as a preliminary composition. As previously mentioned, the dendrochronological investigation suggested a date of around 1630.[365] Again, this is not necessarily binding, but assuming that the analysis is correct, there could have been another commission for an altarpiece around 1630 – presumably for a mystical marriage of Saint Catherine – and Rubens chose to use a composition similar to the then-already-completed "*Madonna Enthroned with Saints*" altarpiece.

It was not unusual for Rubens to re-use his compositions in this way, which becomes apparent when looking at other depictions of the Virgin with the infant Christ. In her essay on the previously-mentioned outer wings of the *Ildefonso* altarpiece showing "*The Holy Family under an Apple Tree*", Fiona Healy brings attention to countless very similar adaptations of the Virgin

364 Of course, it is theoretically possible that the sketch was only shown to a less important representative of the order in Antwerp as a first draft, to discuss the composition's rough outlines. After an initial discussion (which would have involved the request for more saints) the sketch in Berlin would have served as a more official *modello* to show higher-ranking officials in Brussels. However, this scenario seems rather far-fetched.

365 See: Tieze 2009, p. 344.

and Child.[366] This is especially interesting as these adaptations also have validity in the context of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" since the altarpiece shows the same group of figures, only in a less detailed view. The *Ildefonso* altarpiece was one of Rubens's more prestigious commissions, although this did not discourage him from repeating composition and figures of previous paintings.[367]

In light of Rubens's evident willingness to re-use his ideas, it seems entirely possible that the composition seen in the Frankfurt sketch is not a preparatory work at all, but rather a conscious, subsequent adaptation of the subject. This might have been a step with which the workshop was generally entrusted: as has been shown, making adaptations of Rubens's subjects was common for painters such as Teniers and Van Dyck and it is likely that this was part of their training. When looking at the Frankfurt sketch not as a preliminary work but rather a subsequent alteration, the work can be described as a reduction of the composition. In this context, the Stockholm drawing comes to mind, in which this process of reducing figures was perhaps taken even further (Fig. 7).[368] One possible reason for eliminating figures could have been a change of format. The altarpiece's composition was designed for a painting with very large dimensions. If the aim was to adapt this composition to a smaller format that could potentially be sold to private collectors, reducing the composition to fit the private viewing space is a conceivable step. A similar procedure can be observed for the depiction of the holy family: the large-size painting of "*The Holy Family under an Apple Tree*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* shows a total of eight figures, a number that was reduced for the paintings with smaller formats.[369]

366 See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 87–93. This includes – for instance – works such as the "*Holy Family with Saint Francis and Anne and the Infant Saint John the Baptist*" in the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* (no. 02.24) or the "*Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist*" in private ownership (see: ibidem, pages 90 and 92 respectively).

367 Moreover, when generally comparing altarpieces with roughly the same general structure – for instance, a similar monumental architectural setting, reminiscent of Italian paintings, with numerous figures positioned on ascending steps – similarities become apparent. For instance, the preliminary oil sketch for the "*Conversion of Saint Bavo*" in the *National Gallery* in London (no. NG57.1), the corresponding finished altarpiece (sited in Saint Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent), and the two matching altarpieces for the Jesuit Church depicting the miracles of St. Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Francis Xavier, both in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, Vienna (GG 517 and GG 519, respectively) show resemblances. Besides the architectural setting, which includes stairs and columns in the background, entire figures were repeated. A version of a kneeling, slightly twisted rear-view figure, exposing the soles of its feet to the viewer is found all four works (this particular figure was perhaps inspired by similar depictions such as the figure in Jacopo Tintoretto's "*Vulcan's Forge*" in the *Palazzo Ducale,* Venice).

368 Another privately owned version in oil shows the composition with fewer figures and will be discussed below.

369 See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 87–93. A reduced version is, for instance, in the collection of the *Prado* in Madrid (inventory number: P001639).

However, without consulting additional evidence, it is quite impossible to find a convincing answer to the question of the sketch's definite purpose. In the following chapters, in comparison with the additional material, the question of the sketch's position in the chronologic sequence of the design process will be further addressed.

6.3.2. The Oil Sketch in the Salzburg Museum and Other Similar Versions

Even though the sketch in Frankfurt is thought of as Rubens's first attempt, later discarded for the benefit of a more balanced composition, is not the only known version showing this initial configuration of figures. It would be presumptuous to claim that the following chapter is able to list all existing versions, as there is no way of knowing whether further, undocumented copies of this work exist. However, the versions that are known and listed offer the potential of make certain conclusions about the procedures in Rubens's studio. There are versions very similar to the one in Frankfurt, one in the *Salzburg Museum Sammlung Rossacher* (Fig. 23) and one privately-owned (Fig. 24).[370] The latter was sold via the *Dorotheum* auction house in Vienna in 2004 and was previously part of the *Cailleux Collection* in Paris.[371] Another, slightly reduced version is documented as being part of the private collection of M. Knoedler (Fig. 25).[372] It shows the same composition, albeit without the saints to the very right of the panel, with Saint John and Saint Nicholas of Tolentino missing.

There is somewhat conflicting information about a further version "*similar to the sketch at Frankford on Main*", which – according to *Christie's* archives – was part of an auction on 8th June 1928 but failed to sell and was returned to the owner H. M. Sinclair from Dublin.[373] F. Grossmann mentions this sketch but claims it was sold at Christie's on 8th June 1928 and that "*in 1949 it was with Messrs. Spink*".[374] Unfortunately, there is no illustration of this sketch, on the basis of which it could be compared to the other sketches mentioned above. Theoretically, it could be identical

370 The painting in the *Rossacher*-collection in Salzburg (Inv.-Nr. RO 0357) is currently not on display. I kindly thank Mag. Judith Niedermair-Altenburg and Dr. Regina Kaltenbrunner (*Salzburg Museum*) for giving me the opportunity to see the sketch without its frame.

371 The auction of old master paintings took place on 24th March 2004 and the oil sketch (Lot no. 102) was sold for € 60,000.

372 See: Cat.-Detroit 1936 (no. 47).

373 I kindly thank Lynda McLeod, Associate Director of the Christie's Archives for the information pertaining to this sale and the sketch's dimensions, which are 24 ½ inches by 18 ½ inches (62,23 × 46,99 cm).

374 See: Grossmann 1955, p. 337.

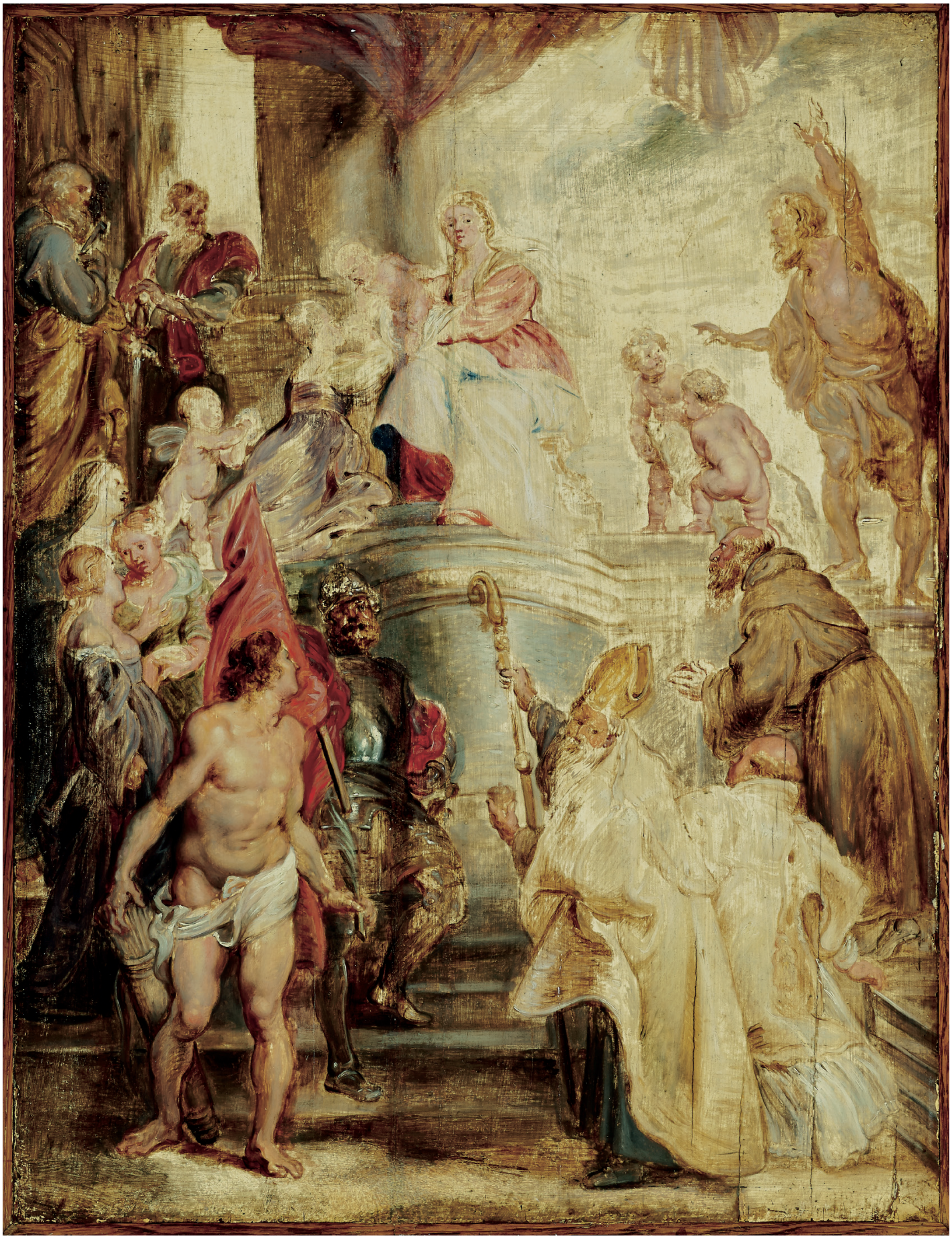


Fig. 23: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine*, 1628, Oil on panel, 63 × 49 cm, Salzburg Museum, Sammlung Rossacher, Salzburg (RO 0357).



Fig. 24: Rubens workshop, *The Marriage of Saint Catherine and the Infant Jesus*, Oil on panel, 64 × 49 cm, Privately-owned (Palais Dorotheum Vienna, 24.03.2004, Lot no. 102).



Fig. 25: Rubens workshop, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints*, Oil on panel, 63.5 × 49.2 cm, Privately-owned (formerly owned by M. Knoedler and Company, New York).

to the sketch sold at the *Dorotheum* in Vienna in 2004 (Fig. 24). However, the measurements specified by *Christie's* and the *Dorotheum* indicate that the sketch mentioned by Grossmann is slightly smaller.[375] If the measurements are indeed correct, the sketch mentioned by Grossmann – which failed to sell at *Christie's* in 1628 – must be an additional copy.[376]

The presence of several versions of one composition such as the sketches mentioned above always begs the question of which of the works came first. The Frankfurt sketch is usually seen as the only true original by Rubens's hand, which is plausible due to the several *pentimenti*, most notably the previously-discussed alteration of the figure of Saint Sebastian (see: Fig. 22).[377] If a sketch is copied after an existing template, there is no conceivable reason for changes throughout

375 The auction house gives the measurements of 64 × 49 cm in the *Dorotheum* catalogue: *"Alte Meister - 24.03.2004"*.

376 It should be noted that measurements of paintings are, in general, more inconsistent than one would assume.

377 See, most recently: Tieze 2009, p. 340ff. However, it should be noted that the Frankfurt sketch is the only sketch that has been technically investigated at this point and although there is no reason to believe this is the case, it cannot be ruled out that the other versions – such as the sketch in Salzburg – also show changes in the painting process.

the working process. In this case, this means that if the Frankfurt sketch had theoretically been done after one of the other versions mentioned above (or an unknown model), there would have been no need to make alterations to Saint Sebastian. In the other versions presented above, Saint Sebastian is shown in the Frankfurt sketch's final form. The Frankfurt sketch is consequently quite certainly the first version of this particular composition.

The sketch in the *Salzburg Museum* (Fig. 23) is a rather faithful copy of the sketch in Frankfurt. It was done on wood panel, which is now embedded in a wooden frame. The original panel measures 63 × 49 cm and is slightly warped horizontally.[378] Besides smaller tears, the panel shows one large end-to-end crack, which goes along the right side of the large column, through the infant Jesus and through Saint George's left foot.[379]

The figures are positioned identically and there are only small differences in terms of image content, such as the "golden apple" depicted in Saint Augustine's right hand.[380] However, details such as the physiognomies of the depicted figures are slightly different, indicating the hand of a different artist. Unfortunately, the sketch is in relatively poor condition and some parts such as the flesh tones were clearly touched more recently. Nonetheless, it remains clear that the general painting process was somewhat similar to the sketch in Frankfurt. In many parts of the composition, the streaky *imprimatura* shines through, which immediately creates a strong association with Rubens's œuvre.[381] Just like with the sketch in Frankfurt, there are also brownish outlines, with which the figures were laid out before colour was applied. This is noticeable in the depiction of Saint Sebastian (see: Fig. 26). The application of colour to these brownish outlines was not done evenly and similar to its model, some figures are worked out in more detail than others. For instance, in both sketches the figure of Saint John the Baptist appears unfinished in comparison with the well-worked-out figures of Saint Sebastian and Saint George (see: Fig. 20 and Fig. 23).

A peculiarity that ties these two sketches in Frankfurt and Salzburg together is the fact that the Salzburg sketch feebly shows the same measurement lines across the bottom of the panel (see: Fig. 26). They coincide with those found on the Frankfurt sketch, more specifically the row that is not headed with numbers. The lines are not only at the exact same places, but they are also similar in their execution, namely very thin marks done with a brown-coloured paint.

378 This makes the panel approximately the same size as the Frankfurt sketch, which measures 64.2 × 49 cm.

379 At this point, the panel was reinforced from the back with a strip of wood.

380 Having seen the other versions of this compositions and knowing of Saint Augustine's attribute, one is inclined to see a flaming heart. However, when looking at the ochre round object objectively it resembles a golden apple not a heart. The possible reasons behind this (for instance, missing layers of paint) will be discussed in a chapter below.

381 See the chapter above on painting underground and underdrawings.



Fig. 26: Detail of: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine*, 1628, Oil on panel, Salzburg Museum, Sammlung Rossacher, Salzburg (RO 0357).

This makes the notion that the Salzburg panel is a copy after Frankfurt almost certain. In most probability, both versions were done in Rubens's workshop around the same time. In light of the dendrochronological investigation of the Frankfurt sketch, a date around 1630 would be conceivable.[382]

6.4. Saint Sebastian and Saint George

Two detail sketches showing only the two isolated figures of Saint Sebastian and Saint George have been preserved in the *Collection P. and N. de Boer* in Amsterdam (Fig. 27), and in the *Museum of Caen* (Fig. 28), respectively. Both of the sketches show Saint Sebastian and Saint George positioned roughly in the way that they are shown in the sketch in Frankfurt: Saint Sebastian is depicted in the foreground and the helmeted Saint George is positioned on the right behind him. However, the figures' body postures and the position of their limbs differ between the two works. Besides the depicted image content, the two sketches also differ in quality. Their roles in the altarpiece's design process will be discussed in the following.

382 This date would coincide with the making of the Stockholm drawing, whose connection with the painting from England of Saint George and the Dragon also indicates a date of origin of around 1630 at the earliest.



Fig. 27: Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Sebastian and Saint George*, Oil on panel, 36.7 × 25.7 cm, P. and N. de Boer Foundation, Amsterdam.



Fig. 28: Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Sebastian and Saint George*, Oil on panel, 41 × 30.5 cm, Musée des Beaux Arts, Caen (48).

Erich Hubala suggested that they were done chronologically after the Frankfurt sketch but *before* the final *modello* in Berlin to further improve the two figures.[383] Nonetheless, this is not very convincing as neither of the two sketches shows real progression towards the significantly-altered depiction of the two figures in the Berlin sketch. The two sketches in Caen and Amsterdam both show Saint Sebastian turning to his left: in both sketches his head is turned towards Saint George who is depicted behind him, on the right side of the composition. On the other hand, in the Berlin sketch (Fig. 29) Saint George is not positioned between Saint Sebastian and the Virgin – as he was in the Frankfurt sketch – but rather to Saint Sebastian's other side, further to the left edge of

383 Hubala 1990, p. 19.

the sketch. In other words, Saint George's pose in the Berlin sketch bears no resemblance to the depiction in the two sketches in Caen and Amsterdam, and he is also shown without his helmet.[384]

Julius Held assumes that both sketches were preparatory works for the Frankfurt sketch, done chronologically after the Stockholm drawing had been completed.[385] This is highly questionable as the Frankfurt sketch shows a number of *pentimenti* in this section (see Fig. 22). The changes in the positioning of the two figures could undoubtedly have been avoided when making not one but two preparatory sketches, especially since the sketch in Caen (Fig. 28) is very similar to the way in which the two saints were depicted in Frankfurt.[386] If the Caen sketch had existed prior to the sketch in Frankfurt, it could have served as an ideal template.

Nonetheless, the two sketches are indeed closely connected to the Frankfurt sketch, in a different and rather peculiar way: the sketch in Amsterdam (Fig. 27) shows Saint Sebastian the way in which he was initially depicted in the sketch in Frankfurt, before a second version was painted on top of the first. The sketch in Caen in turn shows the saint in the same posture visible today. For instance, in the sketch in Amsterdam, Saint Sebastian's right arm on the quiver is not rounded, his knees overlap slightly and his whole torso is arched outwardly towards the front, instead of folding in the area of the navel. In other words, in Amsterdam (Fig. 27), Sebastian's shoulders are positioned slightly behind his hips, while they are positioned vertically above the hips or even slightly in front of them in Caen (Fig. 28). Moreover, in the sketch in Amsterdam the white loincloth is draped more loosely around his lower body, covering his left hip and hanging down towards his left knee. When looking at the IRR of the Frankfurt sketch (Fig. 22), it becomes clear that Saint Sebastian was initially positioned in this exact way, only slightly more to the middle of the sketch. This is particularly obvious when looking at the positioning of Saint Sebastian's right arm, whereby the arm is visible in the radiography and it was not rounded outwardly in the previous version. Furthermore, the loincloth formerly covered part of Saint George's right leg and can be made out clearly under the top layer of paint. The figure of Saint George also seems to have been altered; for instance, his left arm used to rest on a shield. Unfortunately, changes in the figure's posture can only be guessed at, as they are hardly visible in the IRR and the radiography.

384 In order to gaze towards Saint George, Saint Sebastian is shown turning his head towards the opposite direction in the Berlin sketch, away from the Virgin. Furthermore, Saint Sebastian is shown standing on his right leg while his left leg is positioned on the first step leading up towards the pedestal.

385 See: Held 1980, p. 519.

386 Saint Sebastian's left hand is tucked behind his torso in the Caen sketch, while in Frankfurt his arm is stretched and he holds a martyr palm in his hand. For further comparisons see below.

The strong similarity between the depictions of Saint Sebastian in the sketches in Amsterdam (Fig. 27) and Frankfurt (Fig. 20) would theoretically allow for the sketch in Amsterdam to be classified as a preparatory sketch. In this scenario, the initial depiction of Saint Sebastian in the Frankfurt sketch would have been copied from the preparatory work. This positioning of the saint would nevertheless eventually be abandoned and changed to the way in which Saint Sebastian is depicted in the Frankfurt sketch today. However, the Amsterdam sketch cannot be categorised into the artistic process due to stylistic shortcomings. Especially Saint George's face shows the work of an unskilled artist, whereby his eyes are beady and the face lacks depth and expression. Therefore, it seems more likely that the sketch is the product of a training exercise of one of Rubens's pupils. Considering the changes made to Saint Sebastian in the process of making the Frankfurt sketch, the Amsterdam sketch must have been done in Rubens's workshop, while the work on the Frankfurt sketch was still going on. There is also the possibility that the sketch in Amsterdam was done after a further, unknown model.

In terms of artistic skill, the Caen sketch (Fig. 28) shows a superior handling of the brush compared to the version in Amsterdam. The physiognomies are worked out to a higher degree and its overall appearance is of higher quality. For instance, Saint George's armour is painted with much more detail. This makes the sketch more plausible as a preparatory sketch and the sketch is generally seen as an autograph work.[387] Saint Sebastian is depicted in almost the same position in which he is found in the final version in Frankfurt. Small differences include the fact that Saint Sebastian's head is not turned back as far towards Saint George in the sketch in Caen, thus making his face slightly more visible. Moreover, his left underarm is tucked behind his body. Although his legs are shaped very similarly in both sketches, they are a little closer together in Caen, which makes Sebastian seem more stationary. In Frankfurt, the figure is slightly more dynamic and seems to move towards the viewer. Despite these minor differences, the sketch in Caen could theoretically qualify as a preparatory sketch for the second version of the saints in the Frankfurt sketch in terms of compositional similarity. Nonetheless, the making of an additional preparatory oil sketch for two isolated figures is not typical for Rubens's creative process, even less so since the preparatory work would have been made after the work on the Frankfurt oil sketch had already been begun. Rubens would certainly make detailed studies of individual figures, but the sketch does not fit the criteria of an in-depth study, such as the one used for Saint Apollonia (Fig. 48), which will be discussed in a following chapter. Compared to the sketch in Amsterdam, the physiognomies in the Caen sketch are more convincing, yet they still strongly differ from the detailed *tronies* found in Rubens's œuvre. One might assume that the positioning of the two

387 See for instance: Cat.-Berlin 1931, p. 410; Held 1980, I, p. 519; Tieze 2009, II, p. 359.

figures could have been reconsidered by making a simple, quickly-drawn sketch, similar to the drawing in the *Metropolitan Museum* (Fig. 19), while working out detailed physiognomies would have warranted a much more precise work. It seems more likely that the sketch in Caen is also a copy done by one of Rubens's workshop members after the oil sketch in Frankfurt. It is difficult to find a definite answer for the sketch's purpose at this point. However, a look into Rubens's possible sources of inspiration and his collection of drawings provides further insights, which will be addressed in the chapter below.

6.5. The modello in Berlin

> *"One thing is clear at the first glance: there is more movement, more light, more space, and there are more figures in this painting than in any of the earlier ones."* [388]
>
> Ernst Gombrich

The oil sketch in the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin (Fig. 29) is cited in Ernst Gombrich's "*The Story of Art*" to serve as an example of Rubens's outstanding ability to gather figures into a harmonious composition.[389] The assembly of figures shown in this sketch stands somewhat in contrast to the previously-discussed works, as the arrangement appears to be more natural and the figures seem to form a sweeping movement. The figures are arranged to form a reclining c-shaped curve, which sweeps the viewer's glance up towards the Virgin. The sketch is very close to the finished altarpiece, whereby it only differs in smaller details such as the saints' attributes (cf. Fig. 2 and Fig. 29).[390] This sketch illustrates the very last design step, and for this reason it is also often referred to as the "*modello*".[391]

The holy family is surrounded by fourteen saints, who are grouped below her on the steps leading up to the pedestal, and to both her sides. Above the Virgin, a red curtain is draped around a large column.

388 Gombrich 1995, p. 398.

389 See: Gombrich 1995, p. 398–399.

390 The issue of the depiction of the saint's attributes will be discussed in more detail in a following chapter.

391 It is classified as the *modello* for the altarpiece, for instance in: Cat.-Antwerp 1977, p. 187; Tieze 2009, p. 346ff.



Fig. 29: Peter Paul Rubens, *Enthroned Mary with Child and Saints*, 1627/1628, Oil on panel, 80.3 × 55.3 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (780).

In the left background, behind Saint Peter and Saint Paul, further architectural elements can be made out.[392] Two putti descend from above and from behind the red drapery, aiming to crown the Virgin with a laurel wreath.

The wood panel is slightly larger than the previously-mentioned panels, measuring 80.3 × 55.3 cm.[393] Along the bottom of the panel, the work shows signs of tiny marks, similar to those found on the sketch in Salzburg and Frankfurt (see: Fig. 26). As has been discussed, these are evidence of reproduction as they were used to simulate a grid, which helped when copying the composition.[394]

The very right side of the sketch shows a stripe where the colour is a slightly different hue. This is owed to the fact that the work was enlarged during or after the painting process. The strip is about 4.6 cm wide, indicating that the composition might have once measured around 50 cm in width.[395] Per Bjurström and Jan Kelch hold opposite opinions regarding the question of the enlargement on the right strip of the Berlin *modello*: Bjurström sees the discolouring of paint throughout the length of the strip as well as the round arch's lack of symmetry as indications that the strip was added after the completion of the painting.[396] He also observes that beneath the inner part of the right side arch, one can detect the darker outline of the initial arch, before the enlargement. Kelch does not think that it is a later addition, but rather that it was added during the painting process by Rubens himself. He refers to the infrared reflectography and highlights that the colour of the red drapery is not continued beneath the arch's darker paint. However, this may be owed to the fact that there was already a slightly smaller arch painted on this point, before the addition of the strip, and the subsequent enlargement of the arch. The right side of the arch might have only been slightly enlarged during the course of the extension, which would explain the lack of red paint underneath. Ultimately, only further investigations of this specific section will be able to offer certainty. However, in any case, the copies done after this work – which will be discussed in the chapter below – strongly suggest that the adaptation of the panel was done in Rubens's studio.

392 Elizabeth McGrath proposes that the two saints Peter and Paul are depicted in front of the entrance of a grandiose building, perhaps the church itself. See: McGrath 1992, p. 196.

393 See: Cat.-Berlin 1978, p. 45.

394 These markings will be further discussed in the following chapter on the copies done after this sketch.

395 The panel itself is made up of two boards and the small strip on the very right side. The seam of the two main panels runs along Saint Augustine's outstretched finger and the billowing hem of his robe. For an illustration of the board sequence, see: Cat.-Berlin 1978, p. 48.

396 See: Bjurström 1955, p. 41.

There are prominent differences in composition between the *modello* in Berlin (Fig. 29) and the oil sketch in Frankfurt (Fig. 20), which is generally thought to be the former's predecessor. The compositional changes towards a more natural or harmonious arrangement of the figures have been mentioned and the *modello* shows three additional saints, two more putti and significant changes to the depiction of Saint George and Saint Sebastian. The additional figures include a male saint (most likely Saint Joseph) directly behind the Virgin, a fourth female Saint at the left side of the composition and a military saint behind Saint Sebastian.[397] In order to fit the additional figures into the compositional space, the viewpoint was zoomed out.[398] In the Frankfurt sketch (and the other similar versions such as the sketch in Salzburg, Fig. 23) some of the saints cannot be identified when viewing the sketch in isolation as they lack attributes. This is also still the case in the oil sketch in Berlin and includes the monk in the black habit on the right and the group of female saints at the very left of the composition, which was extended by a further figure. The newly-added military saint is usually identified as William of Aquitaine or William of Maleval.[399] However, he is shown with a martyr palm in his left hand. Neither William of Aquitaine nor William of Maleval died a martyr's death and consequently this seems questionable. In comparison with depictions of Saint Maurus in "*The Patrons of the Oratorians*" (*Salzburg Museum*) and "*Saint Gregory the Great Surrounded by Other Saints*" (*Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*), a strong similarity becomes apparent.[400] Saint Maurus is not directly associated with the Augustine Order, but he is a saint who can be called in distress: Maurus is called for gout, rheumatism paralysis and other ailments. This links him to the other saints who are invoked for illnesses, such as Saint Apollonia for toothache, Saint George and Saint Sebastian for the plaque, Saint Catherine for ailments of the tongue and language difficulties. Consequently, the attribution to Saint Maurus should perhaps be considered. It is difficult to identify this saint for certain as the work offers limited clues and in this regard only the context of the commission would offer additional insights. As previously mentioned, the exact circumstance of the painting's patronage is unclear and definite identifications can hardly be made solely based on the saint's depiction.

397 As previously discussed, the oil sketch in Frankfurt included the figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in the left background, Saint Catherine to the Virgin's knees, three female saints on the left on the steps, Saint Sebastian and Saint George in the left foreground, Saint Augustine, Saint Lawrence and a monk in black habit in the right foreground.

398 On the question of Rubens's image space, see for instance: Warnke 1977; Or more recently: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 205–207.

399 See: Tieze 2009, p. 360; Cat.-Antwerp 1977, p. 187.

400 The sketch in the *Salzburg Museum* has the inventory number RO 0357. For an illustration of the sketch in Berlin ("*Saint Gregory the Great Surrounded by Other Saints*"), see: Vlieghe 1973, II, no. 109d.

While the Frankfurt sketch has an overall ochre tonality, the sketch in Berlin shows bright colours, whereby especially features such as the Virgin's garments show a much higher vibrancy, which suggests the use of more high-grade pigments. The whole sketch is worked out much more consistently, to the extent that it almost resembles a small painting. In strong contrast to the oil sketch in Frankfurt, this sketch is easily perceivable as a work presentable to the patrons. The oil sketch in Berlin lives up to the term "*modello*" and it can reasonably be assumed that it served as a model for the making of the monumental altarpiece.

In view of the above considerations – especially the aforementioned outstanding quality of the *modello's* composition – it must be assumed that the *modello* was an original work, or at least that it preceded the sketch in Frankfurt and the other extant works in oil. As could be shown, the *modello* meets all of the necessary criteria to qualify as a preparatory work and it also logically falls into the succession of designs. This conclusion is compatible with the Frankfurt sketch's identification as a subsequent adaptation, as determined in the previous chapter on the work's intended purpose.

6.5.1. Copies After the Oil Sketch in the Gemäldegalerie Berlin: A Painting in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Lost Copy from the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, and a Painting Attributed to Willem Panneels

Three works are very similar to the *modello* in Berlin in terms of the composition and presumably copies after this work.[401] Interestingly, unlike the copies done after the previously-discussed oil sketch in the *Städel Museum* in Frankfurt, the three copies after the *modello* resemble finished paintings rather than preliminary sketches. One of the copies is in the *Museum of Fine Arts* in Boston (Fig. 30), one is only preserved through a black and white illustration – given that the painting has been untraceable since World War II (Fig. 31) – and the third is in private hands and attributed to Willem Panneels (Fig. 32). The paintings are similar insofar that they show the same composition and are almost identical in smaller details, such as depicted attributes. For instance, all works show the painted round arch at the top of the composition, giving the illusion of a roundly-shaped image carrier. Coincidentally, all three works were done on canvas. This is not very typical of Rubens's œuvre as he generally painted smaller works on wooden panels. When Rubens worked on canvas, it was often because large canvases were easily transportable

401 This is not to say that these three works are the only existing copies after the *modello* in Berlin. It cannot be ruled out that there are more, unknown to the author.



Fig. 30: Copy after Peter Paul Rubens, *Virgin and Child adored by Saints*, Oil on canvas, 83.2 × 59.4 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (97.443).

over larger distances, unlike large panel paintings.[402] Moreover, less expensive copies of Rubens's compositions made by the workshop were often executed on pre-made canvases in standard formats.[403] The three paintings all have a different format and consequently potentially only one could classify as such a "standard" work. The degree to which the three works are true to the model in Berlin in terms of style strongly differs. This is noteworthy insofar as even cheaper copies after Rubens's works would generally have been adapted to the high standards of the workshop through a final revision.[404] The three works will be discussed in detail in the following.

402 On Rubens's use of panel and canvas, see: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 46.

403 See: Büttner 2008a, p. 63.

404 See footnote above.



Fig. 31: Copy after Peter Paul Rubens, *Mary adored by Saints/Engagement of Saint Catherine*, Oil on canvas, 160 × 100 cm, Lost since 1945 (formerly Museum Wallraf-Richartz, Cologne).



Fig. 32: Attributed to Willem Panneels, *Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*, Oil on canvas, 84.5 × 54.5 cm, Privately-owned (Auktionshaus Lempertz Cologne, 23.09.2015, Lot no. 51).

The reason why they are classified as copies, or rather the reason why the *modello* in Berlin can be seen as the first version of this specific composition is the fact that the *modello* shows changes to the composition that were done during the painting process.[405] As has been highlighted, when making a copy after an existing work, the template generally prevents the artist from making larger compositional "mistakes". In other words, there is no logical explanation for *pentimenti* when closely working after an existing model. However, the other three works in question have not been thoroughly technically investigated and consequently this assumption is solely made based on what is visible to the naked eye and – in the case of the lost painting – through reproductions.

405 The changes in composition included details such as traces of a flaming heart in the hand of the figure usually identified as Saint Augustine, the slight alteration of Saint Sebastian's leg and the round arch at the top.

Of the two works whose current location is known, the painting in the *Museum of Fine Arts* in Boston (Fig. 30) is stylistically closer to the *modello* in Berlin (Fig. 29). It was part of the *Sedelmeyer Gallery* in Paris and sold to the *Museum of Fine Arts* in 1897.[406] The museum catalogue of the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin from 1978 states that Ludwig Burchard considered the painting to probably be "*painted by Theodor van Thulden*", although there is no further explanation for this attribution.[407] There is hardly any discernible difference between the two works when it comes to the depicted details, such as the curving of the crozier, the lack of a flaming heart, the shape of the shield, etc.[408] The main difference in terms of the pictured figures can be detected in Saint John's animal skin dress, which has a slightly different shape. Stylistically, the two works are also fairly similar, although in the sketch in Berlin the paint was applied more thickly in some areas. Furthermore, the Boston sketch shows flaws in some key areas, whereas the sketch in Berlin is definitely the work of a more capable artist. For instance, the Virgin's face – especially her nose – did not turn out entirely successful in the copy in Boston.

The work measures 83.2 × 59.4 cm, and it is thus only a few centimetres larger than the Berlin *modello*, which measures 80.3 × 55.3 cm. In both works, the paint on the very right side of the painting is slightly discoloured. This is more prominent in the Berlin *modello*, which also shows a little more of the stairs and sky on this side. As previously mentioned, in the case of the *modello* – which was done on panel – this is due to the approximately 4.6 cm wide enlargement.[409] Interestingly, the main difference between the two works – namely the shape of Saint John's billowing loincloth – is depicted precisely on this strip. Perhaps the two works were even more similar at one stage, before this area of the *modello* was enlarged and painted over. In other words, perhaps the Boston painting was done before the *modello* was enlarged. Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine why the Boston sketch should also show these slight changes in paint or discolouring at this exact spot at the very right edge, since this work was done on canvas and not enlarged. It could be owed to the pressure of a frame, entirely uninfluenced by the changes to the *modello* on the exact same spot. Inspecting the back of the image carrier could potentially provide answers.

406 Max Rooses mentions a "*Marriage of Saint Catherine*" which was part of Charles Sedelmeyer's collection in 1894; however, this painting presumably shows an altogether different composition comprising fewer figures. See: Rooses 1892, no. 401.

407 Cat.-Berlin 1931, p. 45.

408 Other details include the depiction of the military saint in a pose, which shows his left arm emerging from behind his shoulder (with the palm leaf), the Virgin's wreath without the attached ribbons, Catherine's wheel and the way the dragon is sprawled on the floor.

409 On the process of enlarging panels or canvases during the painting process, see: Balis/ Van Hout 2012, p. 102ff; Gatenbröcker/ Kaul 2005, p. 17–27; Renger 1994, p. 157ff.

Interestingly, the Boston sketch also shows traces of the fine lines at the edge of the picture base. The sketch in Boston seems to show more than one set of intervals, one of which can definitely be linked to the lines of the Berlin sketch. For instance, both sketches show a fine mark at a point 25 cm from the left side of the panel. The mark indicates a line, which goes directly through the middle of the military saint's head. This line divides both compositions exactly in half, *if* the aforementioned additional strip to the right side of the Berlin sketch's panel is not counted. This further indicates that the strip was added at a later stage.[410] The next mark can be seen approximately 5 cm further to the right and the imaginary line runs through Saint Augustine's index finger, grazing the right tip of the shield above it. Unfortunately, not all lines can be made out clearly, whereby especially in the left side of the composition they become indiscernible. These corresponding lines prompt the assumption that the painting in Boston was done directly after the *modello* in Berlin and not some other copy of the same composition. The work in Boston could theoretically have been made for the market. In Rubens's workshop, it was customary for workshop employees to copy the master's composition to sell on occasions.[411] However, is hardly sufficiently detailed to categorically identify it as a finished painting. Considering the lack of detail and the copying marks, a pupil or employee most probably copied the *modello* for studying purposes. This may well have been done in Rubens's workshop, although – as previously mentioned – the choice of canvas as a support is not particularly characteristic.

The second copy after the *modello* in Berlin is the work now lost, which used to be part of the *Wallraf-Richartz-Museum's* collection in Cologne. It has been missing since 1945, but fortunately at least a black and white reproduction is preserved in the *Rheinisches Bildarchiv*, Cologne (Fig. 31).[412] Oddly the painting is not mentioned in the museum's catalogues of the early-20th century.[413] However, it is listed in the handwritten estate inventory of Ferdinand Franz Wallraf from 1824 as by either Rubens or Van Diepenbeeck.[414] According to the existing information, the painting on canvas was significantly larger than the one in Berlin or Boston, as the *Rheinisches Bildarchiv*

410 This does not necessarily mean it was added at a much later point. It may well have been done shortly after or even during the painting process. Presumably, however, the initial coat of paint had already been applied since there would not be discernible differences between the two pieces otherwise.

411 For instance, the aforementioned letter from Rubens to Sir Dudley Carleton bears testimony to this practice; Rubens had several copied versions of well-known compositions *"at his house"*. See: Magurn 1955, p. 60-61.

412 The slide is in the *Rheinisches Bildarchiv* in Cologne under document number: obj05023703.

413 See for instance: Cat.-Cologne 1905. This may well be owed to the fact that the painting was not on view in the gallery.

414 It is cited under Dutch paintings, number 301 as a painting by *"Diepenbeck"* [sic] or Rubens (*"Maria mit vielen Heiligen"*). See: Wallraf 1824, no. 301.

indicates the painting measured 160 × 100 cm. However, this not possible when looking at the work's proportions, which can be derived from the photograph. The ratio between length and width is very similar to the other two sketches in Berlin and Boston.[415] If the painting is indeed 100 cm in width, it should only measure around 137 cm in height. This significant difference in proportion can hardly be explained by a negligible measuring error and accordingly the work's dimensions could be entirely different.[416]

The sketch or painting seems even closer to the *modello* in Berlin than the previously-discussed work in Boston. The differences discussed between the work in Boston and the *modello* do not exist here; for instance, in the lost work from the *Wallraff-Richartz-Museum* Saint John's animal skin is shown in the exact same way as it is depicted in Berlin. Even the smallest details such as the flowers in the hands of the putto behind the red drape correspond. Accordingly, if indeed this right strip of the Berlin *modello* was added at a later stage, this lost work was done after the changes were made.

As far as can be deduced from the surviving photograph, this lost work also has marks along the bottom edge. In contrast to the other two sketches, these are primarily visible in the left half of the painting and as a result it is difficult to establish whether they exactly match those found on the Berlin sketch based on the surviving photograph. However, it is very likely. Assuming that the markings correspond, this would rule out that the lost work from the *Wallaf-Richartz-Museum* was done after a different copy of the composition, not the *modello* itself. The copyist must have had direct access to the *modello* as he would have made the markings on both the template and the copy.[417] This would certainly have been possible for a pupil or employee of Rubens's workshop. It seems less likely that any person who acquired the painting (presumably after Rubens's death)

415 The works in Berlin and Boston measure 80.3 × 55.3 cm and 83.2 × 59.4 cm respectively and the ratio between length and width for both works is consequently 1.4:1 (when rounded to one decimal place). However, the dimensions of 160 × 100 cm equal a ratio of 1.6:1.

416 Measurements should never be taken for granted. However, if one side were only off by a couple of centimetres it would be possible (if not likely) that someone was simply a little imprecise when taking the measurements. Nonetheless, when the proportions are this far from being correct, the information is practically useless.

417 When copying with the help of a grid, the markings were made on the template or model as well as the copy. The oil sketch from the *Städel Museum* in Frankfurt, for instance, has two sets of markings, which implies that at least one set was used to create a copy after the Frankfurt sketch. The other set could have theoretically been made when creating the sketch itself. However, in the particular case of the Frankfurt sketch, it has been established that it was not a copy but an independent work based on the *pentimenti*. Consequently, both markings must have been added when making copies after the sketch. Another work that proves that it was customary to mark the template itself when making a copy after it and working with a grid is Rubens's drawing of the *"Baptism of Christ"* in the *Departement des Arts Graphiques du Musée du Louvre* (20.187), which is covered not only with markings, but a whole grid. See: Cat.-NewYork 2004, no. 14, p. 93–94.

would have permitted the making of markings on the work. Consequently, it seems probable that the lost work stems from Rubens's workshop; however, although there is no evidence to the contrary, it cannot be verified by further investigating the work. All findings are based on a mere black and white reproduction and consequently any conclusions have to be made with reservations.

The third version (Fig. 32) – which is attributed to Willem Panneels and in a private collection – also shows the same composition found on the *modello* in Berlin: it features the same attributes of the saints, the same enclosing arch at the top and Saint John's billowing fur loincloth is depicted in the same shape. However, it strongly differs from the *modello* and the two paintings discussed above, insofar as it shows a very different and unique style. All surfaces – including the clouds, the fabrics and the architectural elements – appear flatter and sallow and the colour palette is muted. For instance, the Virgin's red dress has blue undertones, which makes the red less vibrant and the contrast between the dress and her blue cloak less vivid. The depiction of physiognomies is distinct insofar as that most figures have large facial features, whereby especially the noses are prominent. The work differs in proportion insofar as that it is more elongated, and the very left and right sections of the composition were omitted. It measures 84.5 × 54.5 cm and this format gives the middle part of the painting an altogether more crowded appearance. At the same time, the additional floor space bereaves the composition of proximity.

In the case of this work, it is difficult to imagine that the artist wanted to emulate Rubens's way of painting and it is not likely that Rubens would have accepted it as a product of his own workshop. Consequently, it is no surprise that Justus Müller-Hofstede did not attribute this particular painting to the "Rubens workshop" based on its stylistic traits. However, it is slightly unclear why Müller-Hofstede specifically ascribed it to Willem Panneels.[418] Panneels was verifiably one of Rubens's students: when he was accepted into the Guild of Saint Luke in 1628, it was recorded that he had previously trained with Rubens.[419] Nonetheless, there are no paintings specifically associated with Panneels.[420] Consequently, there is no comparative material and the mere fact that Panneels was verifiably employed in Rubens's workshop until 1628 is hardly sufficient to support an attribution.

418 According to the auction house *Lempertz* – which sold the painting on 23rd September 2015 – Müller-Hofstede issued a certificate attributing the work to Panneels on 24th January 1982. The painting was up for auction again as part of an auction at *Hampel Fine Art Auctions Munich* on 7th December 2016.

419 This is one of three exceptions in which one of Rubens's pupils is mentioned together with his name in the records of the guild. See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961b, p. 574.

420 See for instance: Büttner 2006, p. 107ff.

Whether by Willem Panneels or not, the painting serves as an example of how an artist – even though he must have been closely associated with Rubens's workshop to have had access to the *modello* – developed an unique and individual style.[421] Panneels became a master of the guild in 1628, so if he indeed is the author of the work, this work was most probably produced under his own name rather than Rubens's. In the previous years, when Panneels was still working under Rubens, it would not have been acceptable to display this personal style of painting, as all works leaving the studio were meant to uniformly represent the master. However, in any case this work can perhaps be seen as a testimony of the beginning of an artist's creative independence. The painter who made this work is still indebted to Rubens regarding the composition, although the stylistic execution is very much his own. The topic of how artists adapted Rubens's compositions in subsequent years will be discussed in a later chapter.

6.6. "La Virgen Rodeada de Santos" – The Reduced Version in the Prado

The *Prado* houses a smaller version of the composition titled "*La Virgen Rodeada de Santos*" (Fig. 33), which is very similar to the finished altarpiece in most aspects, but it also shows elements of the *modello* in Berlin. It measures 64 cm in width and 79 cm in height.[422] According to the *Prado's* catalogue of paintings from 1996, the work is a reduction of the altarpiece by the master himself.[423] In most probability, the work in the *Prado* was a painting done in collaboration with the workshop, chronologically after the Berlin *modello* but simultaneously or even slightly before the altarpiece. This would have been around the end of 1627 or during the first months of 1628.

During the late-19th and early-20th century, it was thought to be a copy after Rubens and attributed to Van Balen.[424] The reasons for the attribution to Van Balen were not specified and are not quite clear: an attribution based on a stylistic analysis is inconceivable, as the painting has no similarities with Van Balen's work. For instance, Van Balen had a very characteristic way of

421 Anthonis van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens, coincidentally Rubens's co-artists for the decoration of the Augustine Church, are perhaps the most well-known examples of how Rubens's pupils successfully stepped out of their master's shadow. Both of them developed a very unique style and (especially the former) had an immensely successful career on their own.

422 Portús/ Sabán 1996, no. 1703, p. 341. The *Prado's* website states that the work measures 79.5 cm in height.

423 Portús/ Sabán 1996, p. 341.

424 It remains unclear, which of the painters of the Van Balen family the *Prado* catalogues refer to. Presumably the painting was attributed to the most famous and influential family member, Hendrik van Balen I. See: Padrón 1975, p. 296.



Fig. 33: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Holy Family surrounded by Saints*, ca. 1630, Oil on panel, 79.5 × 64 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid (P001703).

painting physiognomies, as his figures have round faces with slightly distorted features, which lend the figures a naïve, almost foolish expression.[425] This characteristic cannot be found in this depiction of "*La Virgen Rodeada de Santos*" and generally the painting reflects the stylistic qualities of Rubens's œuvre. To quote the 1975 *Prado* catalogue of paintings on the subject of the attribution to Van Balen: "*Ni su técnica, ni la alta calidad de su ejecución tienen relación alguna con la manera, tímida y cuidada de van Balen*".[426] The catalogue lists a very prestigious provenance: the work stems from Rubens's estate and was bequeathed to Francisco de Roches by Rubens's heirs as a sign of gratitude for helping with the selling of paintings to Philipp IV of Spain.[427] One conceivable reason why the painting was not sold but rather remained a part of Rubens's collection until he passed away around ten years later is Rubens's personal inclination.[428] It might well have adorned a wall in his home or his country estate. De Roches in turn must have passed the painting on to Philipp IV, as in 1700 it is recorded in the inventory of *El Escorial*, from where it entered the *Prado's* collection in 1839. There is little reason to doubt the painting's provenance, although – as has been determined – it is in any case utterly unlikely that Rubens would single-handedly copy one of his own compositions. Rubens would have surely delegated the task of creating a copy after an existing work to one of his assistants. The only conceivable scenario in which Rubens would execute this painting single-handedly is if it preceded the other compositions. However, this would conflict with the Berlin oil sketch's status as preliminary work. Moreover, the painting in the *Prado* is worked out to such a degree that it clearly resembles a finished painting; for instance, the figure's garments are worked out meticulously.[429] The physiognomies are full of character and the overall composition shows the work of a skilled artist.

Compared to other versions of the composition (such as the Berlin *modello*, as well as the altarpiece), the composition in the *Prado* painting is slightly zoomed out. Consequently, additional pictorial space opens to all sides of the painting. The vantage point is also slightly higher than in the other versions, which makes perfect sense as – unlike altarpieces – paintings of this size

425 See, for instance, Van Balen's painting of *"Bacchus and Diana"* in the *Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam (inv. no. SK-A-17).

426 See: Padrón 1975, p. 296. Loosely translated, the quotation states that both the work's technique and the high quality of its execution do not correspond with the *"shy and careful"* painting style of Van Balen.

427 See: Padrón 1975, p. 341.

428 On the occasion of the sale of Rubens's estate, the publisher Jan van Meurs published a list of the paintings that had been in Rubens's possession. There is only one preserved original copy of this »*Specification des peintures trouvées a la Maison mortuaire du feu messire Pierre Paul Rubens*« in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris (*Département des Manuscrits*, Fonds Français 18967, fol. 200–205). The list was published in: Cat.-Antwerp 2004, p. 328ff. For further reflections on the topic of Rubens's collection and property, see: Büttner 2006, p. 86ff.

429 This is especially evident in the armours and the embroidery.

were hung closer to the viewer's eye level.[430] The architecture in the left background is depicted a little more openly, with an additional arch behind Saint Paul's head. The arch behind Saint Peter is more pronounced, rounded and larger. To the right, the view opens up to a small strip of distant landscape and the additional space at the top made room for the adaptation of a putto, which is now positioned to the right – rather than the left side – of the downwards flying putto with the floral wreath. To the left of the composition, the dragon's tail is visible coiling towards the female saints above it. All four edges of the painting show slight discolouring. If not due to a later enlargement, which is not probable on all four sides, this could be owed to the covering of a frame. The frame could potentially have shielded the painting from external influences and thus influenced the ageing process, making these parts appear lighter. The right bottom corner shows the inventory number "390" in white paint about 5 cm to the left of the paintings edge. These kinds of numbers were usually painted on the very edge of a painting and consequently it is probable that a frame covered the outside part of the edge when the inventory number was added.

Although it is usually declared as a copy of the altarpiece, varying details show that this painting is in some respects a work in its own right, while some parts are closer to the Berlin sketch rather than the altarpiece; for instance, the military saint's left arm is visible in both the Berlin *modello* (Fig. 29) and the painting in the *Prado*. However, in the altarpiece, only the very tip of the palm leaf is visible protruding from behind his shoulder (Fig. 2). Again, Saint Clara of Montefalco's scales are depicted, as are Apollonia's pincers, which corresponds with the altarpiece. Similarly, the wreath above the Virgin's head is adorned with ribbons and flowers and the red curtain curls around half of the column from the left. As in the altarpiece, the monk figure in black robes is depicted with a loaf of bread in his hands, although the sun on the chest is not pictured. In place of the star, two brownish round shapes can be made out. Perhaps these shapes are meant to depict the edges of two additional loaves of bread held in his right hand.[431] In the altarpiece, Saint Catherine's wheel is depicted beneath the putto's legs. In the *Prado* version, the attribute is also detectable at this exact position, but covered by an opaque layer of paint. Most probably it was painted over at some point and became visible again over time, due to the fading of colour. Compliant with the Berlin *modello* is the absence of Saint Agnes's lamb and the hand of the military saint, which is visible above his left shoulder (in the finished altarpiece, his hand is hidden behind his shoulder and only the tip of the palm leaf is visible). Entirely unique to the

430 This is another indication that the *modello* in Berlin was indeed the preliminary work, as it shows the same vantage point as the altarpiece.

431 Possible reasons for this change of attributes will be discussed in a chapter below.

version in the *Prado* is the large bow in Saint Sebastian's left hand, which replaced the palm leaf. Interestingly, the shield behind it looks slightly painted over, which could indicate that this area was changed during the painting process. Moreover, the positioning of Saint George's right arm is distinct. In the altarpiece and in the Berlin *modello*, his elbow is bent directly towards the viewer, while in the *Prado* version the arm is pointed towards his back.[432]

There is some confusion concerning the identification of the saints portrayed. In a catalogue of the Flemish paintings in the *Museo del Prado* from 1975, only three of the four depicted female saints are identified: Saint Apollonia, Saint Clara of Montefalco and Saint Agatha.[433] Saint Apollonia and Saint Agatha both have the pincers as their attribute and only one pair of pincers is shown in the hand of the woman in the green dress. One imaginable reason for identifying both Apollonia and Agatha could be that their close interaction was interpreted as an indication of them "sharing" the attribute. In this context, it should be noted that the identification of the female saint in the green dress as Saint Agatha would also suggest a different constellation: the saint positioned in front of her is shown in a blue dress in the *Prado* painting and the blue colour – a symbol of purity – and the close interaction with Saint Agatha could also allude to Saint Lucy. The two saints are often depicted together due to Saint Agatha's role in Saint Lucy's path to Christianity and Rubens had previously already depicted the two saints together for the Jesuit Church.[434] Identifying the four Saints as Saint Lucy, Saint Agatha, Saint Clara of Montefalco and Saint Mary Magdalene would consequently also be a possibility.

In a *Prado* collection catalogue from 1996, only three of the four female saints are mentioned, but Agatha was replaced with Agnes: the publication lists Saint Apollonia, Saint Clara of Montefalco and Saint Agnes.[435] However, Saint Agnes's lamb is not depicted in the *Prado* version of the composition and this identification could only have been made possible by looking at the other "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" versions. Furthermore, the monk saint is inexplicably identified as Saint Benedict.[436] These discrepancies in defining the saints' identities are unsurprising given the key clues – namely the attributes – are altered in this version.

432 In this respect, the Saint George in the *Prado* version is closer to the figure of Saint George in the composition by Correggio, which was mentioned earlier.

433 See: Padrón 1975, p. 341.

434 Saint Lucy's mother was healed on a pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Agatha and Saint Agatha then came to Saint Lucy in her dreams, strengthening her faith and predicting her martyrdom. For an illustration of Rubens's *modello* for the ceiling paintings for the Jesuit Church, see: J. R. Martin 1968, p. 155, no. 29b.

435 See: Portús/Sabán 1996, p. 341.

436 See footnote above.

Perhaps this was part of the reason why this particular composition was copied repeatedly and enjoyed particular popularity. The issue of identifying the figures will be further discussed in the following chapter on changed details and additional meanings.

6.6.1. Numerous Copies after the Painting in the Prado

The painting in the *Prado* was copied numerous times, six of which are known and will be discussed in the following chapter. Three copies can be found in the *Catedral de San Salvador* in Zaragoza (Fig. 34), the *Cornell Fine Arts Museum* (Fig. 35) and the *Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga* in Lisbon (Fig. 36), respectively. Two are in private collections (Fig. 37 and Fig. 38) and one was lost during World War II (last accounted for in *Schloss Rheinsberg*, near Berlin). The painting in Lisbon is attributed to Hendrik van Balen the Elder, but it will be included in this chapter as it is a faithful copy of the painting in the *Prado* in terms of the composition. As was the case with the previously-mentioned versions, it cannot be ruled out that more copies existed at one point or that they fact still exist but are not known.

All versions share in common the fact that they are very close copies of the painting in the *Prado* in terms of the depicted details.[437] This includes – among other things – the bow, which replaced the palm leaf in Saint Sebastian's hand. Interestingly, Saint Catherine's wheel is not visible in the copies and the shield behind Saint Sebastian's bow is rounded. Consequently, these copies in all probability show the two attributes the way in which they looked in the *Prado's* version of the composition when the painting was initially completed, and the underlying attributes were still properly covered by paint. The current condition shows the upper paint layer faded and lets the viewer see the artist's changes to the composition or *pentimenti*. In other words, the existent copies help us to see the *Prado* work's previous condition before time (or restoration) took a toll. These changes to the shield and the spiked wheel are furthermore a confirmation of the fact that the painting in the *Prado* was the first version of this exact composition: if it had been done after a model, there would hardly have been a need for alterations during the painting process.

As was the case with the copies after the *modello* in Berlin, the six versions after the *Prado* painting are also rather different in size and stylistic elaboration. The size of the copies in the *Museu Nacional De Arte Antiga* in Lisbon (Fig. 36) and the *Cornell Fine Arts Museum* (Fig. 35) approximately corresponds with the painting in the *Prado*, measuring 78 × 63 cm and 80 × 63.5 cm,

437 In Spanish, it goes by the name of: "*Virgen con el Niño adorada por santos*" (also "*Sagrada Familia rodeada de Santos*" or "*Desposorios místicos de Santa Catalina*").



Fig. 34: Copy after Peter Paul Rubens, *The Virgin with Child adored by Saints*, ca. 1630—1640, Oil on copper, 87 × 70 cm, Catedral de San Salvador, Sacristía Mayor, Zaragoza.



Fig. 35: Copy after Peter Paul Rubens, *The Virgin and Child Adored by Saints*, Oil on canvas, ca. 1630, 80 × 63.5 cm, Fine Arts Museum, Cornell (1957.11).



Fig. 36: Attributed to Hendrik van Balen I, *Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine*, 1628–1632, Oil on panel, 78 × 63 cm, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.



Fig. 37: Copy after Peter Paul Rubens, *Madonna adored by Saints*, 17th century, Oil on canvas, 99 × 81 cm, Privately-owned (Palais Kinsky Vienna 24.04.2018, Lot no. 633).



Fig. 38: Copy after Peter Paul Rubens, *Madonna with Child and Saints*, Oil on canvas, 154 × 116 cm, Privately-owned (Palais Dorotheum Vienna, 24.04.2018, Lot no. 239).

respectively.[438] They are also roughly similar in terms of style. Nonetheless, the work in Lisbon is attributed to Hendrik van Balen, which is most probably owed to the distinct depiction of the figure's physiognomies. The slightly distorted facial features that are typical of Van Balen have already been mentioned in the previous chapter and this work features the distinctive large noses and button eyes. This is especially evident in the depiction of the Virgin: her nose is long and prominent and her jawline is very round. However, the overall appearance of the painting is still indebted to Rubens's original work. Perhaps the artist did not intend to deviate far from his model or the depiction of the faces was more a product of painterly skill than a conscious choice.

One of the two privately-owned copies – which was recently sold in an auction of the *Auktionshaus Kinski* in Vienna – is very similar in proportion to the painting in the *Prado*, but slightly larger, measuring 99 × 81 cm (Fig. 37).[439] This work is characterised by a very strong contrast all

438 The ratio between length and width is approximately the same for all three works (1:1.24 for the *Prado* painting and 1:1.25 for the other two works in Lisbon and Cornell).

439 This work was done on canvas and was auctioned on 24th April 2018 in the *Palais Kinsky*. The ratio between length and width equals 1:1.22.

throughout, which gives the sketch an almost surreal appearance. For instance, Saint Sebastian's muscles are emphasised with a dark colour. In this case, the will to stay true to the model is less evident and the copy's main commonality with the model is the composition.

The formats of the work in the *Catedral de San Salvator* in Zaragoza (Fig. 34) and the privately-owned painting (Fig. 38) recently sold in an auction at the *Dorotheum* correlate. Both are slightly more rectangular or elongated vertically than the other copies.[440] This allows for more compositional space at the top and bottom of the composition.[441] A recent exhibition catalogue lists the dimensions of 87 × 70 cm for the work in Zaragoza. However, this does not correspond with the painting's format, and probably the incorrect dimensions are owed to a slight measuring error.[442] According to the *Dorotheum*, the privately-owned work measures 166 × 154 cm. This work is significantly larger, but the measurements correspond perfectly with the format of the work.

Besides their format, the two paintings have other likenesses; for instance, both works are similar in terms of the colour effect and tonality. For instance, the red colour is more vibrant in comparison with the other versions and the sky is not blue, but eerily dark. It seems reasonable to suppose that one of the two paintings was the model for the other. The painting in Zaragoza is part of a series of four copies after Rubens, which is now hung in the *sacristía mayor* of the cathedral of *San Salvador*.[443] All four paintings are the same size and this explains why in this particular case the proportions of the work were elongated to fit the series.[444] This indicates that it might well have been the painting in Zaragoza that served as a model for the other privately-owned elongated copy.

Unfortunately, very little is known about the work that was lost during World War II. Since the middle of the 18th century, the painting was part of the picture gallery in the *Schloss Sanssouci* in Potsdam, and it moved to the *Neues Palais* in Potsdam in 1773. From 1942 onwards, it was kept

440 For an illustration of the painting in Zaragoza, see: Cat.-Zaragoza 2015, p. 219.

441 Oddly this privately-owned work was also sold at an auctioned in Vienna on the very same day as the other privately-owned work – namely 24th April 2018 – albeit at a competing auction house.

442 See: Cat.-Zaragoza 2015, p. 218. The dimensions of 87 × 70 cm equal a ratio of 1.24:1. The work itself, however, has a ratio of 1.32:1.

443 All four works show Marian images. This includes an "*Engagement*", an "*Annunciation*", the "*Adoration of the Magi*" and the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" (or "*La Virgen con el Nino adorada por santos*"). See: Lozano López 2015, p. 119.

444 The works were not initially made for "*La Seo*" in Lisbon, but it is not exactly clear as to how the series wound up there. See: Lozano López 2015, p. 115.

in *Schloss Rheinsberg*, north of Berlin, where a forestry master last saw it in 1945.[445] The listed dimensions are 163 × 111 cm. However, the same source also states that the work was done after the painting in the *Prado* and indicates that this painting measures 125 × 87 cm. This is incorrect as the work in the *Prado* measures 79 × 64 cm. Consequently, the source's reliability has to be questioned.

All six of these works show how immensely popular this particular composition was. In contrast to the copies done after the *modello* in Berlin, some of these works done after the painting in the *Prado* show a different or independent style, whereby especially the work in Zaragoza (Fig. 34) and the privately-owned copy sold at the *Dorotheum* (Fig. 38) deviate from Rubens's stylistic character. Perhaps this is owed to the fact that the work was not necessarily copied within Rubens's workshop. As previously mentioned, the paintings done in Rubens's studio were required to be stylistically compliant with Rubens's own works. Given that the work in the *Prado* was in Rubens's possession, it is likely that these deviating works were painted after his death in 1640.

6.6.2. A Hybrid Copy

One further copy worth mentioning is derived from more than one model. It is cited in an auction catalogue from the German auction house *Rudolph Lepke's Kunst-Auktions-Haus* from 1906.[446] The catalogue includes a black and white illustration and indicates that this painting by the "school of P. P. Rubens" was done on panel and measures 90 × 62 cm (Fig. 39). This work is clearly qualitatively not convincing as a work by Rubens, and consequently it does not challenge the established design process. The faces of some of the figures are slightly distorted; for instance, Saint Sebastian's face seems too small for his body. Moreover, the paint is apparently applied in a very pastose way.[447] However, it is difficult to make more detailed stylistic comparisons based on this small black and white reproduction. Nonetheless, it is evident that this work incorporates elements of at least two works. Details such as Saint Sebastian's bow and the round shield behind it are clearly derived from the painting in the *Prado* (Fig. 33). However, the way in which

445 Most paintings by Rubens in the collection of the *Neues Palais* were moved to *Schloss Rheinsberg* in July 1942. This included other works such as: "*Justice of Cambyses*", "*Meleager and Atalante*", "*Diana on Stag Hunt*" and "*Tarquinus and Lucretia*". See: Bartoschek/ Vogtherr 2004, p. 421–423.

446 Lepke 1906, p. 9, no. XIV.

447 In this regard, the work seems to have similarities with the copy attributed to Willem Panneels (see the above chapter on copies after the oil sketch in the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin).



Fig. 39: Copy after Peter Paul Rubens, *The Holy Virgin on a Throne, Surrounded by Saints,* 90 × 62 cm, Privately-owned (Rudolph Lepke's Auctions-Haus Berlin, Auction of General Fabricius's Kiev Gallery, 04.12.1906, no. 69).

Saint George's arm is pointing towards the viewer as well as the painted arch at the top of the composition both refer to the oil sketch or *modello* in the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin (Fig. 29). What seems unique to this work is the fact that a very large part of the chequered floor is depicted, creating more space between the viewer and the depicted figures.

The artist of this work must have been familiar with both the *modello* and the painting in the *Prado*, which indicates that both were accessible in the same location at one point in time. Neither of the two works were reproduced by an engraving and consequently it was most likely the originals themselves that served as models. Theoretically, the numerous copies of could have also served as templates; however, these copies were also done in proximity of the two works, respectively, which serves the same argument. The *Prado* painting was part of Rubens's private collection until his death and subsequently transported far away from Antwerp to Spain. This indicates that the joint location must have been Rubens's workshop or property, as it is unlikely that both works came together after the *Prado* painting entered the possession of

Francisco de Roches and subsequently the collection of Philip IV of Spain. This links the Berlin *modello* to Rubens's studio and thereby further supports the identification of the *modello* as Rubens's preliminary work.

6.7. The Altarpiece for the Sint Augustinuskerk

The painting for the high altar of the *Sint Augustinuskerk* (Fig. 2) was painted on canvas, which – as previously mentioned – is not unusual for Rubens's œuvre, and it measures 564 × 401 cm.[448] In the finished altarpiece in Antwerp, the female saints to the left of the composition are depicted with their attributes: Saint Clara of Montefalco is depicted with balance scales, Apollonia with pincers and Agnes with a sheep. Saint Agnes is holding a hardly detectable metal object in her right hand, presumably also pincers. The fourth woman of this group – who is depicted in the *modello* in Berlin (Fig. 29) but not the sketch in Frankfurt – still shows no particular attribute. Max Rooses identifies her as Mary Magdalene solely based on her pained expression.[449] Saint Catherine is shown with her broken wheel, which is shown behind the putto's feet, and John the Baptist is depicted in his distinctive dress made from animal skin.[450] The male figure behind the Virgin is not shown with attributes, but his positioning so close to the Virgin and child identifies him as Joseph. In the foreground, Saint Augustine is depicted with the flaming heart in his left hand, Saint Lawrence is depicted with the gridiron he was "roasted" on, while the saint on the very right – with a sun on his chest and a loaf of bread in his hands – can be identified as Nicholas of Tolentino.[451] Consequently, the finished altarpiece offers key clues for the identification of the saints that were not available for the previously-discussed versions. Identifying the saints would have been easy for the contemporary viewer when worshipping

448 See for instance: Held 1980, p. 519. On the issue of supports (canvas and panel), see the above chapter on supports and underdrawings.

449 See: Rooses 1892, I, p. 285. A similar depiction of Mary Magdalene, with her hand by her face, can be seen in the "*Entombment*" in the *J. Paul Getty Museum* in Los Angeles (93.PA.9). For an illustration, see: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, no. 100, p. 246.

450 According to the saint's legend, the emperor gave the order for Saint Catherine to be martyred on a wheel, spiked with sharp knives and nails. However, the wheel was shattered and the executioner stricken down by thunder and lighting. The emperor then gave the order to behead her, after which angels carried her body to mount Sinai.

451 The figure was identified as Saint Nicholas of Tolentino by Max Rooses due to him, presumably, wearing the black habit of the Augustinian-Eremites and the star on his chest (see: Rooses 1892, I, p. 285.). Although this is probably correct, Nicholas of Tolentino would generally be depicted holding a bowl with two fried birds in it and the loaf of bread seems somewhat untypical. Because of that star (or sun) he was previously also identified as Thomas of Aquino and due to the loaf of bread as Francis of Assisi.

the high altar and the depicted saints were called upon in adversity. The subject of the saints' identities will be discussed in a following chapter, although at this point it can be noted that Rubens only included additional references in this finished version. Not including attributes beforehand must have been a conscious choice.

Arnout Balis and Nico van Hout have made critical observations regarding the altarpiece's application of colour, which is typical for this stage in Rubens's career and characterised by a scarcity of contours. They write: "*The foreground and background in his late works meet more as adjacent areas of colour than within painted contours. That blurred handling of paint is clearly visible in the rendering of the textures of the military sash and banner of St George and the Madonna Adored by Saints*".[452] In other words, the colour is applied right up to the outside edge of a depicted object without discernible outlines. Balis and Van Hout link the fact that Rubens experimented with thin paint, which was paired with a strong use of the ground layers, with his diplomatic mission to Spain. The royal collection apparently renewed his interest in the painting methods of Titian.[453] However, the altarpiece was finished before Rubens set out for diplomatic mission.[454] This serves to show how difficult (and at times deceptive) it is to link stylistic shifts in Rubens's œuvre to major biographical events. Especially Titian's influence on Rubens during two widely-disparate points in his life – namely his travels to Italy during his late-twenties and his diplomatic mission to Spain two decades later – has received strong scholarly attention.[455] This is certainly warranted to some degree as Rubens was undoubtedly influenced by the artworks of Titian, among others. However, Balis and Van Hout have plausibly shown that the altarpiece shows a certain characteristic application of colour typical for the end of the decade. Consequently, the shift in style or working method happened months before Rubens set foot in Spain. Perhaps Rubens's shifts in style were less the product of external stimulation than of his internal and creative development.

Furthermore, when discussing the issue of Rubens's painting technique based on large works such as altarpieces, the previously elaborated workshop practices should be kept in mind. It is questionable whether the master himself would have indeed painted Saint George's sash and banner, as these two parts of the painting can hardly be classified as crucial sections. Given the presence of a well-worked-out *modello*, it can be assumed that Rubens's involvement in the painting process of the large painting focused on the essential parts, such as the faces of the

452 See: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 15.

453 Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 14.

454 See the above chapter on the background of the commission for the *Sint-Augustinuskerk's* altarpiece.

455 See for instance: Goldfarb/ Freedberg/ Mena Marqués 1998.

figures or the finishing touches.[456] Nonetheless, as Balis and Van Hout have shown, Rubens's stylistic characteristics and developments can be observed in the less important parts of the altarpiece. This demonstrates that even though Rubens's own involvement was perhaps limited, he very much defined the way in which his paintings were executed. Consequently, the workshop's involvement was subject to Rubens's stylistic fluctuation as much as his own hand.[457]

As has been shown, the various versions of the composition were each copied numerous times. Interestingly, this is not the case for the finished altarpiece. Considering that this was the composition on public display, and it was reproduced in two prints, this is fairly surprising. The reasons for this could lie in the circumstance that the oil sketches and the painting now in the *Prado* were readily available in the workshop for Rubens's employees to copy them.[458] This would mean that most of the copies were done during the time period before Rubens's passing in the 1630s. It is difficult to imagine an outsider having access to these works.[459] Nonetheless, each copy could have potentially served as a model for the next copy. Unfortunately, it is unclear what happened with works that were produced in the workshop but could not be sold, such as the products of the pupil's training exercises.[460] It is possible that they stayed in the maker's possession and that the pupils were allowed to take the works with them when they finished his training. If this were the case, the copies could have served as templates for further copies done outside the confines of Rubens's workshop. Hence, it is almost impossible to say whether all works originate directly from Rubens's studio. Being able to date the works – for instance, through dendrochronological investigations – would potentially shed more light on the copies' origination background. In this context, an estimated origination date during the 1630s would point towards the studio, whereas a later date could rule this out. In any case, the fact that most of the copies do not show the most publicly-available version of the composition – namely the altarpiece – but versions that were only available in the workshop indicate that at least a large part of the copying activity took place in Rubens's studio.

456 See the above chapters on Rubens's studio practice and the issue of single-handed execution.

457 In the introduction to their catalogue, Arnout Balis and Nico van Hout offer a concise summary of these stylistic changes in Rubens's manner of painting. See: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 8-15.

458 The *Prado* painting is said to have been part of Rubens's estate sale, which would fit this theory. See the previous chapter on the reduced version in the *Prado*.

459 According to an aforementioned letter from Rubens to his employee Lukas – in which Rubens reminds him to lock all the works up properly – Rubens was meticulous about storing his artworks. See the chapter above on drawings. For the complete letter, see: Magurn 1955, p. 411.

460 These works would not have met the usual standards of Rubens's workshop and consequently it seems very unlikely that they were sold under his name.

Another reason for the lack of copies of the altarpiece's composition could lie in the fact that the altarpiece shows the composition from a lower vantage point due to its intended hanging above the heads of its viewers. When transferring the composition to a smaller painting – which usually hangs slightly lower, perhaps even at eye level – the perspective is unsuitable. Given that the copies have significantly smaller proportions and were presumably all made for private use, the copying of the altarpiece would pose a disadvantage in comparison with the other versions.[461]

One final aspect that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter below is the fact that the copies show less precise depictions of the saints. Perhaps this too was a reason for the stronger popularity of the other versions and not the altarpiece, which allowed less room regarding the identities of the saints.

6.8. The Saints – Identities and Inspiration

As shown in the previous chapters, the figures depicted in the different version of the composition vary. Some compositions show more saints than others, while the way in which the saints are depicted differs from work to work. In the following chapter, the changes will be examined and possible reasons for this variance will be assessed. Moreover, Rubens's sources of inspiration for these figures will be shown, along with the possible information that the use of these models can offer with respect to the design process and the work's intended purpose.

6.8.1. From Marble to Flesh – Rubens's Application of Mirror-Inverted Antique Models for the Figure of Saint Sebastian

Upon very first glance, the figure of Saint Sebastian shows similarity to antique statues. This is hardly surprising given that in 17th-century art theory the antique statue epitomised the ideal artistic realisation of the human body, whereby they were venerated for uniting physical movements and spiritual expression in perfect harmony.[462] For instance, the previously-mentioned folding forward of the torso with a slight kink in the naval area – found in the sketches

461 For instance, the painting in the *Prado* shows the composition from a slightly higher perspective, which is visually emphasized by the depiction of a longer stretch of floor.

462 On Rubens's use of antique models or "*Leitbilder*", see Jochen Sander's essay, in: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 181–183.

in Frankfurt and Caen – is visibly derived from the very famous "*Torso del Belvedere*".[463] When in Rome, Rubens made several *ricordi* of the statue, one of which can be found on the *verso* of the previously-discussed drawing in the *Metropolitan Museum* (Fig. 18).[464] The assumed purpose of the two oil sketches depicting Saint Sebastian and Saint George, in Caen (Fig. 28) and from the collection de Boer (Fig. 27) was to test out the positioning of the two figures before transferring them to the larger oil sketch (Fig. 20).[465] According to this theory, Rubens was not one hundred per cent pleased with the first version of Saint Sebastian and adapted him by creating a second, slightly different pose. Ultimately, both of these poses would be replaced by a third, very different positioning, which can be seen in the Berlin *modello* (Fig. 29). However, a close look at other sources of inspirations makes this process of developing the figure in subsequent steps seem unlikely.

The depiction of Saint Sebastian in the de Boer sketch does not show the forward fold in the naval area and – as previously discussed – the figure's centre of gravity completely differs from that in the other versions in oil.[466] A Hermes statue in the *Museo Pio-Clementino* – which was long known as the "*Belvedere Antinous*" – shows an almost identical posture of the upper body and it is very likely that the figure of Saint Sebastian in the de Boer sketch was modelled after this statue. Rubens made a drawing of the statue during his stay in Rome, a copy of which is kept in the *Statens Museum for Kunst* in Copenhagen today (Fig. 9).[467] Upon first glance, the drawing is somewhat similar to the figure of Saint Sebastian, although when one of them is mirror inverted, the figures become almost identical (Fig. 42).

463 For a discussion on the Torso's influence on Rubens's artistic production, see: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 181.

464 See: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 142.

465 The sketches are generally thought to be preparatory works by Rubens. Merely their chronological placement in the creative process has been subject of debate. For instance, Bjurström and Grossmann thought the sketches were both done after the drawing in Stockholm, but before the sketch in Frankfurt. See: Bjurström 1955, p. 41; Grossmann 1955, p. 337. On the other hand, Burchard place the sketch chronologically after the work in Frankfurt. See: Cat.-Berlin 1931, p. 411. For further research on the subject, see: Tieze 2009, p. 350–351.

466 A very similar pose is also found in the drawing in the *Metropolitan Museum*, as well as the rejected drawing in the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm. However, none of the three figures are identical. For instance, in the two drawings, Saint Sebastian's head is turned further towards the viewer and his left arm is held close to his body, whereas in the de Boer sketch his left arm is raised waist-high and his face is shown in profile. In the *Metropolitan Museum's* drawing Saint Sebastian's legs are positioned in the same way as in the sketch, whereas they are shown slightly more apart in the Stockholm sketch. Nonetheless, all three versions are derived from the same model, as will be discussed in the following.

467 See: Van der Meulen 1968, III, no. 55. In 1671, Jan de Bisschop made an engraving of this drawing (after Willem Doudijns), which can be seen in the *Philadelphia Museum of Art*.

This was not the only example of Rubens paraphrasing this famous antique model. A depiction of Christ in a now-lost painting showing "*The Transverberation of St. Teresa of Avila*" also shows the same figure.[468]

This mirroring of figures is rather common in Rubens's compositions, as well as the works of his pupils and employees. Rubens mirrored numerous figures that he recorded during his travels, as well as figures from his own repertoire.[469] In turn, when members of Rubens's workshop copied his works, they also often mirrored them.[470] The process of recording noteworthy figures and then using their mirror images for compositions is by no means limited to single human figures. In the previously-mentioned oil sketch for the St. Bavo Altarpiece (*National Gallery*, London), Rubens used a mirror-inverted version of two horses and riders depicted in Titian's "*Ecce Homo*" (*Kunsthistorisches Museum*, Vienna).[471] In the context of the discussion concerning where and when Rubens actually saw and recorded paintings by Titian, it has been suggested that Rubens worked not only from original paintings but also from reversed prints.[472] This could theoretically be a reason for the inverted figures. However, a drawing by Rubens after Titian's two figures on horseback – which shows the two riders in the same way as they are depicted in the painting – can refute this: it makes the fact obvious that Rubens did not have a mirror-inverted template, but one that resembled the original.[473] Mirror inverting the figures was thus a conscious decision during

468 For an illustration of the lost work, see: Vlieghe 1973, II, no. 150, p. 159. For the figure of Christ in the "*Transverberation of St. Teresa of Avila*" the image was not mirror inverted. The "*Doryphoros*" by Polykleitos is usually also cited as a source (see: Vlieghe 1973, II, p. 160). This is plausible, although the "*Doryphoros*" is relatively straight backed whereas the "*Belvedere Antinous*" shows the distinct forward curving of the silhouette.

469 Examples of this practice will follow below. For a recent essay on Rubens's inverted images, see Nils Büttner's contribution in: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 249ff.

470 One example of many is Anthonis van Dyck's mirror-inverted version of Jacob the Elder (on loan in the *Museum of Fine Arts* in Boston) after Rubens's eponymous painting in the *Prado* in Madrid. Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 37.

471 The horses are only seen in the oil sketch and were abandoned in the significantly-changed final altarpiece. This is not the only case in which the animal was depicted. For instance, the same horse is shown in "*The Meeting of David and Abigail*" (*The Detroit Institute of Art,* Michigan).

472 See: Wood 2010a, p. 164.

473 In his drawing (now in the *Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen*, Rotterdam), Rubens altered the figures slightly, insofar as he changed the rider in armour to resemble Charles V. In the first of the two *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*-volumes (on Rubens's copies and adaptations after Titian and North Italian art) by Jeremy Wood, the drawing of the two horsemen after Titian is illustrated in colour, but – rather confusingly – mirror-inverted (see: Wood 2010a, I, plate 7, no. 114.). In the second volume – which contains the list of illustrations – the drawing is shown correctly (the correct version can be made out by the "R" in the bottom left corner of the drawing). See: Wood 2010a, II, fig. 41 (no. 114); For a large illustration in colour, see: Cat.-Edinburgh 2002, p. 28.

the process of designing the St. Bavo Altarpiece's composition. The positioning of the figure of Saint Sebastian in the de Boer sketch (Fig. 27) can consequently not truly be seen as Rubens's new creation; rather, it is a copy or a paraphrase of an existing artwork and his drawing of the statue makes proof of this (see: Fig. 42). This is relevant insofar as the alleged purpose of the de Boer sketch and the reason it is included into the design process of the altarpiece by most scholars is the fact that Rubens supposedly worked on the saint's positioning.[474] However, if the saint was done after an antique model, the need to tweak and test the figure's pose seems less plausible.

When looking at the other versions of Saint Sebastian in the sketches in Caen (Fig. 28) and Frankfurt (Fig. 20), Sebastian's pose seems altered or rather reworked and consequently the subsequent versions are generally seen as Rubens's continued development of the initial figure.[475] However, when comparing the figure in Caen and Frankfurt to other works by Rubens, it becomes clear that Sebastian was altered insofar as he is now derived from a different model or rather models. The forward fold, the turn of the torso, the loincloth and the dynamic position of the legs in the Frankfurt sketch are very similar to the depiction of Christ in the "*Flagellation of Christ*" by Sebastiano del Piombo in *San Pietro in Montorio* in Rome.[476] Rubens had previously adapted this figure for his painting of the "*Baptism of Christ*", one of his earliest works, now in the *Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten* in Antwerp (Fig. 40).[477] The depiction of Christ as well as the man undressing himself on the very right both show strong similarities with del Piombo's depiction of the shackled Christ. Although the Saint Sebastian in the Frankfurt sketch as well as the two figures in the "*Baptism of Christ*" are clearly indebted to the same model, they all slightly diverge from it in different ways; for instance, the man undressing himself and Saint Sebastian step forward in the same dynamic way, whereas Rubens depicted Christ a little more static.[478] Nonetheless, del Piombo's bound Christ is not the only figure, which seems to have been exemplary for Rubens's depiction of Saint Sebastian in the Frankfurt sketch: as previously mentioned, Saint Sebastian's

474 See, among others: Tieze 2009, p. 350–351.

475 See for instance: Bjurström 1955, p. 41; In some cases, the de Boer sketch is not seen as the first version of Saint Sebastian, however, the concept Rubens developing the figure by means of several sketches applies all the same. For a list of publications on the subject, see Tieze, cited in the footnote above.

476 It can be assumed that Sebastian del Piombo was also greatly inspired by the antique models. Citing his "*Flagellation*" and the "*Torso del Belvedere*" both as sources of inspiration might seem redundant. However, del Piombo's figure is shown with legs and a loincloth, both of which found their way into Rubens's adaptation. Consequently, only taking the "*Torso del Belvedere*" into account would be insufficient.

477 The painting's inventory number in the *Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten* is "707". For a short discussion on the work's Italian influences, see: Wood 2010a, I, p. 240.

478 Also noteworthy in this context is a drawing of this same figure attributed to Michelangelo, which is considered a preparatory work for the "*Flagellation*" (*British Museum*, London, no. 1895,0915.813). Michelangelo is said to have been Sebastiano del Piombo's assistant on the project of San Pietro in Montorio.



Fig. 40: Peter Paul Rubens, *Baptism of Christ*, 1604–1605, Oil on canvas, 411 × 675 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (707).

torso is also close to the "*Torso del Belvedere*". In this context, the subtle differences between two very similar male figures becomes clear again: in contrast to Saint Sebastian, Rubens's depiction of Christ in the "*Baptism*" is closer to the "*Gaddi Torso*" than the "*Torso del Belvedere*" as it lacks the characteristic asymmetrical rotation.[479] The main difference between the poses shown in the two antique statues is that the shoulders of the "*Gaddi Torso*" are in line with his hips and parallel to the viewer, whereas the "*Torso del Belvedere*" shows a rotated spine, which results in one shoulder being more visible to the viewer than the other when seen from the front. In the depiction of Saint Sebastian in the Frankfurt sketch, this forward rotation of the right shoulder is even more pronounced than in the sketch in Caen.

Rubens's placement of Saint Sebastian's right arm on the quiver in the Frankfurt sketch is most probably derived from a drawing after Michelangelo's *Hercules* statue by Bartolomeo Passarotti, which was retouched by Rubens (Fig. 41).[480] The convex way in which his right arm is placed on his quiver is identical to the way in which the Hercules figure holds his wooden club. Interestingly, the *Hermes* statue – which seems to have been the main inspiration for Saint Sebastian's leg position in the two drawings (in the *Metropolitan Museum* and the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm respectively, see: Fig. 42) and the sketch from the de Boer collection – seems to have also been a model for the Saint Sebastian in Frankfurt: only for the latter was the statue consulted from a very

479 The "*Gaddi Torso*" is displayed in the *Uffizi* in Florence and dates from the second century BCE. During Rubens's lifetime the torso was part of the Florentine Gaddi family's collection, from which it got its name.

480 The marble statue is lost today, but was at the *Château de Fontainebleau* during the 17th century, where Rubens might have seen it in the early 1620s. See: Wood 2010c, II, no. 88; Cat.-Edinburgh 2002, no. 16, p. 47/48.



Fig. 41: Bartolomeo Passarotti after Michelangelo, retouched by Rubens, *Hercules*, Pen and ink over faint traces of black chalk, retouched with wash on paper, 30.5 × 16.9 cm, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris (20.213).



Fig. 42: Mirror-inverted illustration of Fig. 9: *Hermes Belvedere (Antinous)* and Detail of Fig. 19: *The Virgin Adored by Saints (recto)/Study of the Torso Belvedere*.

different perspective, namely from the direct front. The drawing – which most probably inspired the prior works – recorded the statue from a side angle.[481] Finally, the modelling of Sebastian's feet – especially his left foot – seems to have been derived from a drawing after Andrea Mantegna retouched by Rubens, titled "*Nude Youth with a Cornucopia*" in the *Kupferstichkabinett* in Berlin (Fig. 43).[482] While the aforementioned statues above all show the supporting leg's foot directly from the front, Saint Sebastian's foot reveals more of the foot's arch, very much like the "*Nude Youth*".[483]

481 The statue was initially recorded from the right and mirror inverting the image resulted in the exposition of the figure's right side. For the two drawings showing both versions, see: Van der Meulen 1968, III, cat. no. 53/55.

482 The drawing is done after Mantegna's engraving *"Bacchanal with a Wine Vat"*. For an illustration of model and drawing, see: Wood 2010b, II, cat. no. 19/20.

483 For the drawings of the Hercules's foot (*Statens Museum for Kunst*, Copenhagen), see: Van der Meulen 1968, cat. no. 51/52.

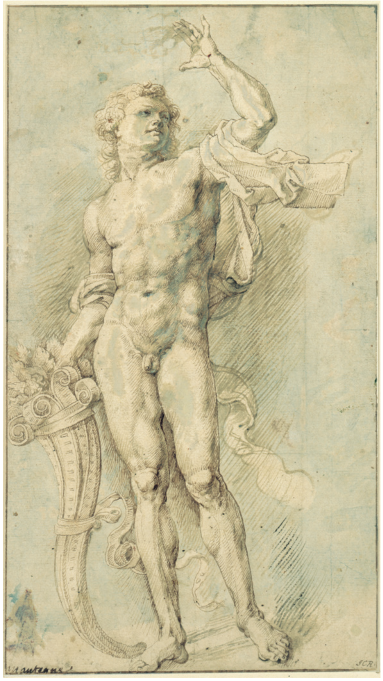


Fig. 43: After Andrea Mantegna, retouched by Rubens, *Nude Youth with a Cornucopia*, Pen and ink, retouched in brown wash, yellowish gouache and heightened with white, 25.6 × 14.2 cm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin (KdZ 1.551).



Fig. 44: Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Augustine*, Oil on panel, 38 × 17 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (WA1855.177).

As a result, it can be concluded in summary that it was not only one single statue or work of art that offered inspiration, but most likely an array of numerous figures from which Rubens drew motives.[484] On top of these listed antique and Italian "sources of inspiration", Rubens had depicted a standing male figure similar to Saint Sebastian on numerous previous occasions. The same applies to most of the other saints depicted in the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*". Previous depictions of similar figures as well as the of what these models – whether other iconic artworks or Rubens's own, previously-done works – can reveal about the general design process will be discussed in the following chapter.

484 In his essay on Rubens's creative tools ("*Rubens' schöpferische Hilfsmittel*"), David Jaffé makes a similar observation concerning the use of multiple sources for one figure. He lists the following example: when Rubens's drew (or reworked) a drawing of two prisoners after Francesco Salviati's *Farnese*-fresco (*Musée Pincé*, Angers), he added the toes of one of the two sons of the *Laokoon* (*Musei Vaticani*, no. MV 1059). See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 58.

6.8.2. Figures Revisited – Adaptations of Rubens's Own Compositions

The figure of Saint Augustine was depicted in other paintings and consequently the saint did not have to be developed from scratch for his depiction in the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*".[485] Examples include the figure of Saint Ambrose in "*The Real Presence In The Holy Sacrament*" (*Saint Paul's Church*, Antwerp), which was painted around 1609 and a corresponding oil sketch of "*Saint Augustine*" in the *Ashmolean Museum* in Oxford (Fig. 44).[486] The similarity between these two figures and the figure of Saint Augustine in the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" versions becomes more obvious when the figure of Saint Ambrose of *Saint Paul's* is mirror inverted. Although the *Ashmolean Museum* oil sketch's execution shows characteristics typical of Rubens's painting technique, such as an extremely thin application of paint, certain stylistic shortcomings do not necessarily indicate a completion by Rubens's hand, but perhaps by one of his pupils or employees. For instance, the figure's facial features lack depth and seem unrefined.[487] However, in any case, the sketch still portrays a figure that was clearly part of Rubens's repertoire when the composition "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" was developed. Hans Vlieghe questions a direct link between the portrayed saints in the sketch in Oxford and the painting in *Saint Paul's*, given that two different saints are depicted, and one figure is shown in reverse.[488] However, as has been highlighted in the previous chapter, mirror inverting figures was a common practice in Rubens's creative process and consequently these arguments are not entirely convincing.[489] To the contrary, it can be assumed that the two very similar figures were indeed taken from the same model, even if they were subsequently inverted.[490]

485 The figure in the foreground – which can clearly be identified as Saint Augustine in some of the compositions due to the flaming heart in his hand – will be referred to as "Saint Augustine" even though – as will be discussed – this identification is not quite accurate in all versions.

486 For illustrations, see: Vlieghe 1973, I, no. 56 and no. 65.

487 Furthermore, the whole figure seems very two-dimensional and the areal application of paint is very unlike Rubens's usually such dynamic brushwork.

488 See: Vlieghe 1973, I, p. 96.

489 Hans Vlieghe's argument, that two different saints are depicted will be addressed further below.

490 In this particular case, the oil sketch in the *Ashmolean Museum* was most probably done either after an additional unknown sketch or the painting in *Saint Paul's*.

Saint Augustine's pluvial gown in "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" is almost identical to the episcopal robes that Saint Ambrose is wearing in the oil sketch showing the "*Defenders Of The Eucharist*" in the *Museo del Prado* (Fig. 45).[491] The golden colour of the gown's fabric, the figurative representations on the border and the clypeus with the decorative tassel are clearly derived from the same model.[492] However, the angle of the figure is slightly different in the *Prado* sketch, as Saint Ambrose's back is turned further towards the viewer. In this context, the depiction of "*Theodosius and Saint Ambrose*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* (Fig. 46) is more accurate, which is especially obvious when looking at Abraham van Diepenbeeck's copy of the same subject, in which the saint is not obscured by the figure of a child.[493]

A similar case applies with the depiction of Saint Lawrence and Nicholas of Tolentino: the former has a strong similarity to a kneeling figure in the painting of "*The Last Communion of Francis of Assisi*" in the *Royal Museum of Fine Arts* in Antwerp (Fig. 47), when one of the figures is looked at in reverse.[494] As previously mentioned, Nicholas of Tolentino is clearly derived from Titian's depiction of Saint Bernardino of Siena (see: Fig. 4).[495]

Not only the prominent figures in the foreground of the composition were based on pre-existing models. For instance, the features of Saint Apollonia are almost identical to a previously-mentioned drawing of a "*Young Woman Looking Down* " (or "*Study for Saint Apollonia*") in the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York (Fig. 48).[496] When the depiction of a figure – or any other specific detail – in a drawing and a painting correspond in such a clearly recognisable way, the respective drawing is usually dated to the period of the creation of the painting. This is not implausible, since drawings could have served to work out details before transferring

491 The composition is part of a series of 20 works, which Rubens designed for a tapestry cycle. It was commissioned by the Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia for the convent church of the *Señoras Religiosas Descalzas Reales* in Madrid. There is also a painting of the subject in the *John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art* in Sarasota (SN214).

492 A detailed drawing of an almost identical fold in the fabric is in the *Fitzwilliam Museum* in Cambridge. For an illustration, see: Vlieghe 1973, II, no. 10.

493 The painting in Vienna is dated to 1615/16. The painting by Diepenbeeek entered a private collection through a sale at *Christie's Auction House* in 2007.

494 They are similar in statue, although their garments are different. In "*The Last Communion of Francis of Assisi*", the figure is wearing a white garment, probably a surplice, while Saint Lawrence is clothed in a golden habiliment, most likely an ornate dalmatic. Saint Lawrence's pose can also be compared to a kneeling figure in the right foreground of the composition "*The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency*" (the oil sketch is in the *Alte Pinakothek*, München and the monumental finished painting in the *Musée du Louvre*, Paris).

495 A similar drawing, most probably a copy after Rubens, is illustrated in the *Corpus Rubenianum* Volume XIII on Saints. See: Vlieghe 1973, I, no. 170.

496 See: Held 1986, no. 170, p. 251.



Fig. 45: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Defenders of the Eucharist*, ca. 1625, Oil on panel, 68 × 65.5 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid (P001695/001).



Fig. 46: Peter Paul Rubens, *Saint Ambrose and Emperor Theodosius*, 1615/16, Oil on canvas, 362 × 246 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Gemäldegalerie, 524).



Fig. 47: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Last Communion of Saint Francis*, 1619, Oil on panel, 422 × 226 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (305).



Fig. 48: Peter Paul Rubens, *Young Woman Looking Down (Study for the Head of Saint Apollonia)*, 1628, Black and red chalk, heightened with white, retouched with pen and brown ink, 41.4 × 28.7 cm, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence (1043 E).

them to the panel or canvas in oil. Additional sources, such as letters or invoices, which allow the dating of a project, are more often found in connection with paintings than drawings. However, it should be noted that since Rubens recycled his figures so often, it is not always clear which specific painting truly prompted the making of the drawing.[497] For instance, three drawings of a woman from different angles in the *Albertina* in Vienna are usually associated with the "*Ildefonso Altarpiece*" *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna.[498] However, when looking at the painting "*Head of Cyrus Brought to Queen Tomyris*" – which was completed between 1622 and 1623 – the depicted women also show similar physiognomies.[499] Consequently, it could also be assumed that the drawings were done as early as 1621/1622 and are part of the ealier painting's design process. Apart from this, it is also possible that some of these detailed studies were made without a specific composition in mind, much like the *ricordi*. Instead of a process in which Rubens would conjure up an idea in his head, organise a model to pose in his thought-out way, sketch him or her and subsequently transfer this study to the painting, the starting point of the procedure may well have been Rubens browsing through a range of catalogued sketches, looking for a fitting pose. The fact that so many of the figures were indeed recycled makes the latter scenario conceivable. However, if the former scenario was the case, and these detailed drawings were usually done *ad hoc*, it has to be noted that the drawing of the figure of Saint Apollonia is an exception, given that such a detailed sketch is not preserved for any of the other figures in the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*". Consequently, the existence of a precise drawing of the relatively marginal figure of Saint Apollonia raises the question of whether all other figures were prepared in such a detailed fashion with drawings that are lost today, or if the drawing of the "*Young Woman Looking Down*" was not was created *ad hoc* for this composition but randomly available in Rubens's collection of drawings. Unfortunately, this cannot be determined based on the material available today.

The list of comparative material for figures depicted in "*Madonna Enthroned with Child an Saints*" goes on – even if less rich in detail – and almost every figure has a preceding counterpart somewhere in Rubens's œuvre. For instance, when seen in reverse, Saint Peter is very similar to

497 Saint Apollonia is not the only figure that can be associated with this drawing. When looking at the painting "*The Meeting of David and Abigail*" (*The Detroit Institute of Art*, Michigan), it becomes clear that when mirror inverted, the figure in the yellow dress is also clearly derived from the same model. However, this painting is dated from 1625-1630 and consequently it is not clear whether it was done before or after the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*". A further example would be the various depictions of "*Meleager and Atalante*" (versions of this composition can be found – for instance – in the *Alte Pinakothek* in Munich or the *Gemäldegalerie* in Dresden).

498 See: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 214–218. Vlieghe 1973, II, p. 88–89.

499 The painting "*Head of Cyrus Brought to Queen Tomyris*" is currently in the *Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston (41.40). See, for instance: Berger 1979, p. 22ff.

"*A Study of a Head (Saint Ambrose)*" in the *National Gallery of Scotland* and Saint Paul resembles depictions such as "*The Bust of Christ*".[500] Regarding the colour of their robes and their beards, the saints mimic a standard form of presentation.[501] The same can be said for the remaining female saints, such as Saint Clara of Montefalco, as well as the putti. As previously mentioned, Saint George (the way he is depicted in the finished altarpiece and similar versions) is close to a figure in a drawing after a painting by Correggio (see: Fig. 5). The figure could also have been influenced by the depiction of Caron in a drawing by Rubens, presumably after Raphael ("*Psyché monte dans la Barque de Caron et refuse d'écouter un Vieillard qui lui demande l'Aumône*").[502] Saint Joseph – behind the virgin – is also known from Rubens's other depictions of the holy family.[503] Besides the drawings after other artists and the one detailed drawing used as a model for Saint Apollonia, most correspondences were found with figures depicted in other paintings of Rubens. It is important to note that these paintings had most probably already left Rubens's studio at the time when the altarpiece was designed. Especially large paintings such as altarpieces that were made to order would have generally left the premises as soon as they were completed.[504] The only way in which these compositions were accessible years later was through copies. Rubens's catalogue of figure studies and oil sketches must have been much larger and more diverse than the number of sketches known today. It is easy to imagine that Rubens had some form of record of every painting and figure that he ever made.

Apart from the organisational perspective, the repetition of figures is telling with respect to Rubens's creative process. The fact that Rubens incorporated numerous artworks by other artists into his own figures, and – on top of this – often repeated his own works is noteworthy insofar as that it offers clues about the figures' artistic development: building on his own past compositions should generally have simplified Rubens's process of designing figures and the same applies

500 The "*Study of a Head (Saint Ambrose)*" in the *National Gallery of Scotland* in Edinburgh has the accession number NG 2097. For two versions of "*The Bust of Christ*" after Rubens, see: Vlieghe 1973, I, no. 10/11.

501 See for instance: Vlieghe 1973, I, no. 89–93.

502 See: Lugt 1949, p. 47, no. 1077.

503 See for instance the privately-owned painting "*The Holy Family with Saint John*" (Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 92) or the altarpiece "*The Adoration of the Magi*" in the King's College Chapel in Cambridge.

504 Rubens's letter to Sir Dudley Carleton bears testimony to this; Rubens lists all the available paintings in his studio, which are only eleven plus a series depicting twelve apostles. Although this could also only reflect the number of paintings Rubens wanted to trade with Carleton, from a business perspective it is unlikely that he kept an abundance of works stored in his studio. See: Magurn 1955, p. 60–61.

to the borrowing from existing artworks.[505] For instance, during the process of making *ricordi*, Rubens must have studied these antique and Italian works very diligently. Irrespective of their art theoretical content, after making copies of these antique artworks, Rubens was doubtlessly closely acquainted with their physical appearance.[506]

Including an abundance of different material such as drawings and oil sketches into a preparatory process is often justified by Rubens's alleged quest to find the "ideal" composition or positioning of specific figures. This is certainly the case with the material depicting the figures of Saint Sebastian and Saint George for the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*".[507] However, despite these alleged preparations, the sketch in Frankfurt still shows changes – or *pentimenti* – to the pose of Saint Sebastian, which makes the whole process of making numerous preparatory sketches seem redundant (see: Fig. 22).[508] Given that Rubens had already dealt with the depiction of a very similar male figure for paintings such as the "*Baptism of Christ*" (Fig. 40), the process of making a drawing followed by not one but two detailed oil sketches before even starting work on the actual composition of the whole painting seems excessive. This is particularly the case since – as has been shown – the versions of Saint Sebastian are derived from various antique models. The figures would still have to be specified to some degree since they are not exact repetitions of existing works, although the fact that Rubens was building on existing poses and gestures should have given him a considerable head start in the design process. The often-quoted principle that Rubens did not copy his own compositions should also diligently be extended to the preparatory process. In summary, this makes the existence of numerous single-handed preparatory works all the more unlikely.

505 Having made numerous *ricordi* after the antiques in question, these poses would have most probably been very familiar to him. Coincidentally, none other than the already discussed first drawing for the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" in the *Metropolitan Museum* itself shows a *ricordo* of the *Torso del Belvedere* on the *verso*. See: Cat.-NewYork 2004.

506 On the specific subject of making copies after antiques, see the recent catalogue: Cat.-Vienna 2017b.

507 This mainly concerns the drawing in the *Metropolitan Museum*, the sketch in Caen and the sketch from the collection *de Boer,* which are generally thought to have preceded the sketch in Frankfurt. For a list of literature on the subject of the works chronological succession, see the above chapters on the drawing and the two sketches, respectively.

508 The underlying version of Saint Sebastian in the sketch in Frankfurt can be emphasized in this context, as technically this work shows two depictions of the saint above one another, reflecting one further attempt to "get the figure right".

6.9. Changed Details and Additional Meanings

The figure of Saint Sebastian appears in all versions of the composition "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" – even the drawings – and was changed most dramatically throughout them. However, as has been discussed, the changes to his appearance were to some degree the result of compositional alterations. It was shown that the different figures were derived from different models. These changes – although radical – upon first sight only altered the pictorial composition, but not the figure's role or message. He is easily identified as Saint Sebastian, as his right hand is rested on his quiver, while in his left he holds a palm leaf, further identifying him as a martyr saint.[509] However, in the painting in the *Prado* and its numerous copies, his left hand is shown holding a bow instead of a palm leaf (Fig. 33). Although the identification as Saint Sebastian is still evident, this change of attribute was definitely a deliberate contentual decision and cannot be categorised as a compositional necessity. In other words, there must have been a reason behind the alteration regarding the figure's meaning; for instance, the bow could be understood as a reference towards "*Amor Divinus*". The personification of godly love is at times also depicted in the form of a youth with a bow and arrow. For instance, an etching of the "*Triumph of Amor Divinus over Amor*" by Hieronymus Wierix from around 1603 shows *Amor Divinus* triumphing over Cupido.[510] As Anne Buschhoff highlights, in Wierix's etching the two figures of Amor Divinus and Cupido confronting each other was a reinvention or transformation of the more conventional Eros-Anteros subject, whereby *Amor Divinus* took over the conventional role of the "virtuous Anteros". The Eros-Anteros subject was consequently transferred to a more religious meaning, which Buschhoff interprets as a development in the context of the Counter Reformation.[511] It is difficult to say whether Rubens knew this particular etching by Wierix, but the general topic of earthly and godly love in rivalry and the different variations of this subject were most certainly familiar to him, as will be shown below.

This possible additional meaning that can be read into the figure of Saint Sebastian is reinforced by the figure facing him: Saint Augustine with his flaming heart is depicted exactly opposite Saint Sebastian.

509 Solely in the drawing in Stockholm, Saint Sebastian is supported by something more easily identifiable as a wooden log than quiver. However, he is still shown with the martyr palm in his left hand.

510 For an illustration, see: Buschhoff 2013, p. 157.

511 See: Buschhoff 2013, p. 158.

The church father famously set the wounds inflicted by love in the case of the pagan gods Venus and Cupid in analogy to the rapture of a believer by an arrow of godly love. In his *Confessiones IX, 21*, Augustine writes: "[…] *sagittaveras tu cor nostrum charitate tua*".[512] This is the reason why Saint Augustine's attribute is a pierced, flaming heart.

The depiction of two putti with two different sets of wings is a further detail that the finished altarpiece (Fig. 2) and the painting in the *Prado* (Fig. 33) have in common, which is not depicted consistently in all versions of the composition and which can also be interpreted along the same lines: in the altarpiece and the *Prado* version, the putto flying above the Virgin with a wreath is depicted with the wings of a dragonfly, while the putto bearing flowers behind Saint Catherine has the feathered wings of an eagle. Showing two putti with these specific sets of wings is common in Rubens's œuvre and generally interpreted as a depiction of Amor and Psyche.[513] Amor and Psyche with butterfly wings can already be found on early Christian sarcophagi, since the Greek word "psyche" means both soul and butterfly. The butterfly wings were morphed over time into those resembling a dragonfly. It might initially seem odd to find a reference to pagan gods in a catholic altarpiece. However, already the first Christians in Rome reinvented the two pagan characters in their favour. For instance, the Latin author Arnobius the Younger described Christ as Amor in his "*Adversus Nationes*", which he wrote in 305 AD.[514] The narrative of Amor and Psyche was particularly popular in the visual arts from the 15th century onwards.[515] When linking Christ with Amor, the connection to Psyche is easily applied to the relationship of Christ to the human soul: Psyche can be interpreted as the human soul, which is reformed by love (Amor) and rewarded after her ordeal. These Christian reinterpretation and appropriation of initially pagan subjects were prevalent during the early-17th century, particularly in the context of emblem books. To Rubens, the religious reinterpretation was well known, as his former teacher Otto van Veen had recently published the emblem book *Amoris Divini Emblemata*.[516] This book was a religious reinterpretation of Van Veen's initial work *Amorum Emblemata* that had been published in 1608.

512 Cited in: Buschhoff 2013, p. 162. In own translation: "*you will pierce our hearts with the arrows of your love*".

513 The story of Cupid or Amor and Psyche from the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius from the 2nd century AD tells the story of love between the god Amor and the mortal princess Psyche and their ultimate union in a sacred marriage.

514 After Arnobius converted to Christianity, he fought against pagan mythology by contrasting it with Christian ethics. See: Buschhoff 2013, p. 158.

515 In this context Raphael's "*Loggia di Psyche*" in the *Villa Farnesina* or Sebastiano Filippi's decoration of the *Este-Palace* in Ferrara are worth mentioning. Moreover, Amor's characteristic mischievousness was often incorporated into the depiction of putti.

516 Martin Nutius and Johannes Meursius published Otto van Veen's "*Amoris Divini Emblemata*" in 1615, which Van Veen wrote at the suggestion of the Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia. See: Buschhoff 2013, p. 11.

Saint Sebastian's possible connection to *Amor Divinus* and the reinterpreted Eros-Anteros motive follows the same lines as the presence of Amor and Psyche in the painting: it can be read as a nod towards the Christian interpretation of the antique subject of the "triumph of salvific love". Consequently, the changed attribute offers an indication of a multi-layered or ambiguous reading of the *Prado* painting's content. For the altarpiece, Saint Sebastian was equipped with the palm leaf, an additional reference towards his martyrdom, which is perhaps more the direction the altarpiece was to be read. The changes to Saint Sebastian's attribute in the *Prado* painting (and the additional levels of meaning these small changes provoked) can thus be understood as a further development or an additional charging of the composition regarding its multi-layered meaning and content.

The saint identified as Saint Augustine can be found in every version of the composition done in oil. Even though the changes are much subtler than the significantly-changed Saint Sebastian, they are nonetheless meaningful. The changes mainly concern his attributes, namely the flaming heart and his crozier. In the Frankfurt sketch (Fig. 20), the crozier's spiral is turned to the left, away from the figure, whereas in the *modello* in Berlin (Fig. 29) and some other similar versions – such as the copy in the *Museum of Fine Arts* in Boston (Fig. 30) – the spiral turns to the right, or inwards towards the figure. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the Frankfurt sketch shows a *pentimento* indicating the spiral could have initially turned towards the saint and was altered to turn to the right at a later point.[517] In the finished altarpiece (Fig. 2), the spiral turns towards the left, away from the saint, but is positioned on the right side of the imaginary line cast by the staff's shaft, forming a line similar to a question mark. The depiction of Saint Augustine's flaming heart is not less peculiar; for instance, it is depicted in the finished altarpiece, in the painting in the *Prado* and its copies, the sketch in Salzburg (Fig. 23)[518] and the versions similar to it.[519] However, Saint Augustine's hand is empty in the *modello* in Berlin (Fig. 29), the sketch in Frankfurt (Fig. 20), the painting in Boston (Fig. 30), and the lost painting previously in Cologne (Fig. 31), among others.

517 If the *modello* in Berlin had indeed been done between the sketch in Frankfurt and the altar-piece, the *pentimento* is rather peculiar: the painter would have initially turned the crozier to the right in the Frankfurt sketch but retouched it to make it turn to the left, only to go back to turning it to the right in the following sketch (the *modello* in Berlin), only to change it again – to the left – in the finished altar piece.

518 The sketch in Salzburg shows a round shape, which rather resembles a golden apple. A golden apple would point towards Saint Nicholas of Myra, although the heart's flames and smoke could be gone in line with the sketch's poor condition. In any case, the saint's hand is clearly not empty.

519 It is difficult to say for sure on the basis of the black and white image, but most likely the sketch from the M. Knoedler collection (Fig. 25) shows a flaming heart.

Nonetheless, the sketch in Frankfurt and the one in Berlin show *pentimenti* right above Saint Augustine's left hand, which indicates that there used to be a flaming heart, which was later over painted.[520]

In all of the versions that lack the flaming heart (except the sketch in Frankfurt, which seems to represent an exception in many ways), the crozier correspondingly points towards the saint. This is relevant insofar as that a spiral pointing away from the carrier symbolises a bishop, whereas an inward-pointing spiral is generally used to depict abbots. This is a reference to the fact that an abbot acts inwardly towards the church, whereas a bishop acts outwardly towards the people. When depicted without the attribute of the flaming heart and with the crozier spiralling inwardly towards the right, this figure can no longer convincingly be identified as the bishop Saint Augustine.

When looking at the other changes made to the saints in the other versions, a similar pattern becomes apparent. In the finished altarpiece in Antwerp, almost all saints are depicted with their attributes (Fig. 2).[521] Regarding the identity of these figures, there is room for debate only insofar as that some saints share the same attributes and it is difficult to decide between a few narrowed-down possibilities. The monk saint is such a case. He was identified as Thomas of Aquino, Saint Benedict and Nicholas of Tolentino, as both these saints are depicted with a star or sun on their chest.[522] By contrast, in other versions, such as the version in the *Prado* (Fig. 33), specific changes can be made out concerning the saints' attributes. As highlighted above, Saint Agnes's attributes are missing, Mary Magdalene's hand is visible next to her face, the palm leaf in Saint Sebastian's left hand was replaced by a large bow and the sun on the chest of the monk figure has been replaced by a brownish round shape. Two of these alterations change the identity of the figure: without the lamb, the figure in the blue dress shown in profile can no longer be identified as Saint Agnes and the monk's identity also becomes indeterminable.

520 In the case of the sketch in Berlin this can be seen with the naked eye. It would be of great value to technically investigate this sketch and to see whether it also shows a *pentimento* along the crozier – like the sketch in Frankfurt – or not.

521 The figure – which was identified as Mary Magdalene, is shown without an attribute – as is Joseph behind the Virgin.

522 It is difficult to determine which of the saints would have fitted the context, as it is not exactly clear as to why these specific saints were assembled in the composition. As has been discussed, there is the possibility of them being the patron saints of the donors or they represent holy helpers (see the chapter on the altarpiece's commission above). For instance, Tieze identified the figure as Nicholas of Tolentino. See: Tieze 2009, p. 341ff; In the *Prado* Museum Catalogue, on the other hand, he is listed as Saint Benedict; see: Portús/Sabán 1996, p. 341.

The sketch in Berlin (Fig. 29) shows more radical changes: the four female saints on the steps are all depicted without attributes.[523] Moreover, Saint Catherine's wheel is depicted directly underneath her, not behind the putto's legs and the figure of Nicholas of Tolentino has neither sun on his chest nor bread in his hands. As previously mentioned, Saint Augustine's flaming heart was also painted over. The same is true for the work in Boston (Fig. 30), except Saint Augustine's hand does not show a *pentimento* and his crozier is turned to the right, towards him.

These numerous differences beg the question of the reasoning behind these alterations. As already indicated, the identity of the depicted saints is only established with the help of their attributes. Because the attributes are so unclear in many of the sketches, scholars have often attributed the saints with the help of other versions. For instance, most saints in the Frankfurt sketch cannot be identified without looking to other works.[524] However, the references or clues can only be transferred from other versions if one assumes that all of the compositions were meant to illustrate and mean the exact same thing. As shown above, it cannot be taken for granted, that the Frankfurt sketch is a preliminary work for the altarpiece. It may well have been a subsequent reduction of the composition. Furthermore, the fact that the changes to the attributes were willfully made (even if they seem small) has to be taken into account: depicting saints without attributes is most certainly not neglect on the part of the artist, but a conscious decision and should be interpreted as such. In this context, a letter that Rubens wrote in February 1608 to Annibale Chieppio – Secretary of State to Vincenzo Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua – can be cited. Wanting to sell a painting that he had originally made for the *Chiesa Nuova*, Rubens comments on the depiction of saints and describes his work as follows:

> "*In order that you may be well informed on everything, I will tell you that the composition is very beautiful because of the number, size, and variety of the figures of old men, young men, and ladies richly dressed. And although all these figures are saints, they have no special attributes or insignia, which could not be applied to any other saints of similar rank*".[525]

With this in mind, the lack of attributes obtains significant meaning. The additional version can consequently not only be seen as compositional adaptations but drastic changes to the image's

523 The figure of Saint Apollonia is depicted without her pincers, Saint Agnes without the sheep and Saint Clara of Montefalco without her scales.

524 See for instance: Tieze 2009.

525 For the full letter, see: Magurn 1955, p. 43.



Fig. 49: Hendrik Snyers after Peter Paul Rubens, *Mary with Child adored by Saints*, 1635–1644, Engraving, 58.6 × 47.0 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (RP-P-OB-70.126).



Fig. 50: Rombout Eynhoudts after Peter Paul Rubens, *The Virgin Enthroned with Child and Saints*, 1635–1680, Engraving, 41.9 × 29.3 cm, British Museum, London (1891,0414.776).

message. In changing the attributes, the composition's iconography was altered from an image content relating specifically to the Augustinian Order to a more neutral assembly of saints, or – in the case of the *Prado* painting – further possibilities of interpretation. If the oil sketch in Frankfurt was indeed a preliminary work for a different, subsequent painting or paintings, it is conceivable that attributes were included in the successive work *ad hoc,* according to its future location and the buyer's wishes. By changing the smallest of detail, the composition is potentially detached from its initial key significance and fully transformed to form additional multi-layered meaning that can be read specifically for each individual work.

6.10. The Engravings by Hendrick Snyers and Remoldus Eynhoudt

Although the engravings are not part of the preliminary process, they will be very briefly discussed in the following chapter as their content is telling in respect to the other material's intended purpose. Potentially some works attributed to the preparatory process could have been made to serve as templates for the engravers and this possibility must be clarified.

The "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" was one of Rubens's more popular subjects and the previously-mentioned numerous copies are a testimony to that. However, the smaller reproductions were most likely made for private collections and not seen by many viewers, once they reached their owners premises. The composition's high recognition value was definitely fuelled by the fact that the large painting hung as a main altarpiece in a newly-erected church. Apart from this, the composition was most certainly known to the largest percentage of people through two engravings by Hendrick Snyers (Fig. 49) and Remoldus Eynhoudt (Fig. 50), respectively. The prints are both quite accurate reproductions of the altarpiece and they show details that are only depicted in the finished work, such as the military saint's hidden arm. This rules out the possibility that any one of the oil sketches listed above served as a template for the engravers.

The engraving by Snyers measures 58.6 × 47.0 cm and reproduced the composition in a very detailed and well-worked-out fashion. Below the illustration the engraving is dedicated to Ioannes Mertens of the Augustine Order by "*Abr. Van Diepenbeke*" and further reads "*Pet. Paul Rubens pinxit et Hendrick Snyers sculpsit; Abraham à Diepenbeke execudit Antuerpiae Cum priuilegio*".[526] Eynhoudt's engraving is significantly smaller (41.9 × 29.3 cm) and shows a coarser execution. The details are not as delicately worked out and the depiction of the faces shows less skill. They differ in small details; for instance, the latter print does not show ribbons in the Virgin's wreath, which is held above her by a single putto in both cases. Moreover, the chequered floor is more evident in the engraving by Snyers. Nonetheless, it is clear that only the altarpiece or a faithful copy could have been the engravers template and consequently the works discussed above must have originated for other reasons.

526 See: DeHoop Scheffer/Boon 1983, p. 100.



Fig. 51: Jan van Kessel I and Cornelis Schut, *A wreath of flowers surrounding a cartouche with the Holy Family and putti*, Oil on canvas, 119.4 × 88.9 cm, Privately-owned (Palais Dorotheum Vienna, 17.10.2017, Lot no. 112).

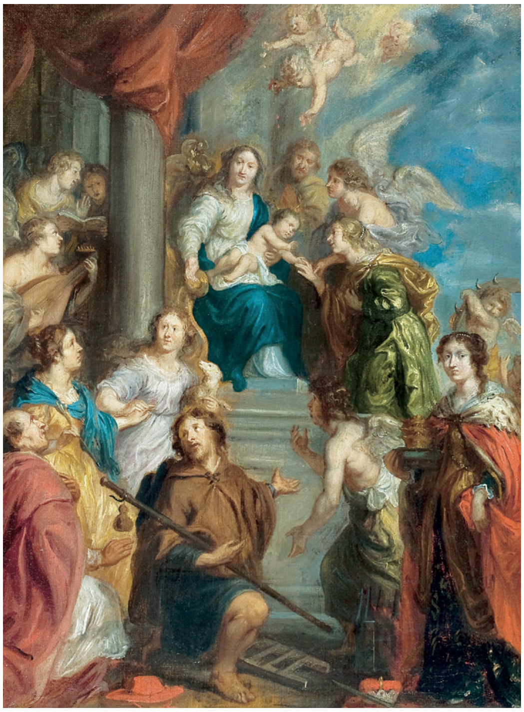


Fig. 52: Theodor Boeyermans, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, 1635–1678, Oil on canvas, 54.3 × 39.1 cm, Stedelijke Musea, Mechelen.

6.11. Adaptations of the Subject

The large popularity of the subject also led to later adaptations of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*", such as the painting of "*A wreath of Flowers Surrounding a Cartouche with the Holy Family and Putti*" by Jan van Kessel I (Fig. 51).[527] This work was painted on canvas and measures 119.4 × 88.9 cm. The painting shows an elaborate flower wreath, which encircles a stone cartouche. The image on the cartouche was presumably done by Cornelis Schut and it shows a depiction of the central motif of the composition, namely the Virgin enthroned with the Child on her lap. A putto – who is depicted to the left of Saint Catherine in the original panting – replaced the female martyr saint in this composition. Consequently, it is now the putto who stretches towards the infant Christ.

527 The painting was auctioned at the *Palais Dorotheum* in Vienna on 17th October 2017.

This is an assembling of figures known from a work discussed earlier: an infant reaching towards the child placed on the lap of a female figure is depicted in this same way in the top half of the drawing in the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm (Fig. 8).

Cornelis Schut is often thought to have been one of Rubens's pupils. He became a master of the Guild of Saint Luke in 1618/19 and he verifiably worked with Rubens on the *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*.[528] Consequently, Schut potentially came into contact with the composition of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" in Rubens's studio. Although it cannot be verified for certain, the possibility that the drawing in Stockholm was done by Schut cannot be ruled out. The sheet would in that case represent Schut's recording of two of Rubens's paintings, namely the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" and the "*Landscape with Saint George and the Dragon*". The technique of accentuating chalk drawings with wash is closer to the œuvre of Schut than it is to Rubens.[529] Schut's drawings show a similar handling of the figures' eyes insofar as that they are shown as slits or points and give the figures a beady eyed look. This is perhaps insufficient evidence to confidently attribute the drawing to Cornelis Schut. However, the adaptation of this composition serves to show that Rubens himself is not the only person worth considering when attributing creative adaptations of his subjects.

An example of how the whole composition of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" was interpreted anew is a work done almost half a century later by the Antwerp artists Theodor Boyermans. It is titled "*The Madonna Venerated by Saints*" and still in its original location, namely the Begijnhof Church in Malines, Belgium. The work measures 450 × 310 cm and is signed and dated 1672. The composition shows very different figures such as the church's patron saint, Saint Alexis. However, key elements of Rubens's painting such as the architectural setting with the column and the red drape were copied. Interestingly, the triangular shape of the drape in Boeyermans oil sketch of the subject in the *Stedelijke Musea Mechelen* (Fig. 52) is very similar to the way in which the drape is depicted in the version shown in the oil sketch now in the *Städel Museum* in Frankfurt (Fig. 20).[530]

528 The *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi* was the triumphal entry procession for the Cardinal-Infant Ferdinand of Austria, who became Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, after Isabella Clara Eugenia's passing in 1633. Rubens was in charge of the elaborate decorations. See: J. R. Martin 1972.

529 See, for instance, the drawing of "*The Resurrection*" sold at Sotheby's on 31st January 2018 or "*The Assembly of the Olympic Gods with Apollo and Daphne*", sold at a Millon auction in Paris on 1st April 2016.

530 For an illustration of the oil sketch, see: Cat.-Worcester 1983, p. 23.

This begs the question of whether Boeyermans's source of inspiration truly was the altarpiece or if he had access to the oil sketch in question. If this were the case, some tie to Rubens's workshop can be assumed.[531]

In any case, it becomes apparent that Rubens's compositions served as an inspiration for the following generations of artists, which went far beyond the making of exact copies. The process of adapting subjects also leaves traces of preparatory material and consequently when coming across drawings or sketches that show modified versions of Rubens's compositions, the step towards attributing it to the master himself should be taken cautiously.

531 Boeyermans was accepted into the Guild of Saint Luke in 1654, fourteen years after Rubens's death, insofar it is impossible that he fully trained with Rubens. See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961b, p. 248. However it cannot be ruled out that he came into contact with the workshop at some point before that, or second hand through one of Rubens's employees. For instance, van Dyck has been suggested as his teacher.

7. Conclusion

Considering the vast amount of literature on Rubens, there are relatively few studies on his creative process and workshop organisation. Although a number of publications have focused on the subject of his preparatory drawings and oil sketches, respectively, the question of how these elements of the design process interrelate – and what can be gathered from the existing material regarding Rubens's collaboration with his employees – has not been subject of much research. The disattribution of an artwork is a sensitive issue and it is generally met with reluctance from the owner or owning institution. Most likely, this has also contributed to the optimistic assumption that only the master himself would have pursued the creative task of designing compositions. In other words, if deemed authentic and categorised as preparatory material, a work can be accepted as single-handedly done by Rubens. Consequently, drawings and oil sketches are primarily seen as Rubens's creative outlets and as a means of communication between himself and his employees. While these purposes might indeed frequently apply, defining a preparatory process based on the existing material without considering a logical chronological progression or the historical contexts can be misleading. For instance, the socio-historical reasoning that Rubens would not have made copies of his own work must be accepted even if more than one version of a subject exists and even if both versions appear convincing as work's by Rubens's hand.

It was the main goal of this dissertation to further investigate Rubens's preparatory process and workshop practices. This was based on a careful analysis of written sources as well as an evaluation of how the available preparatory material such as drawings and oil sketches can offer clues to the working methods of the workshop, and vice versa. It was essential to assess the design processes from the very first drawing to the finished painting and this approach was exemplified by the presented case study, the design process for the composition of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*". In this respect, great consideration was given to the previously-established framework, which included the historical context as well as the circumstances specific to Rubens.

Initially, the context in which Rubens's œuvre was created was evaluated. This included an account of the cultural environment and the practises of the 17th-century, as well as the previous historical developments that had shaped the art market and production in Rubens's hometown. The relevance of authorship and single-handed execution to the 17th-century buyer was assessed, with the result that there is no trace of a preference for autograph work visible, beyond a more general demand for high quality. The importance of a substantiated awareness of socio-historical circumstances often becomes apparent in seemingly small details. This becomes especially obvious when a whole theory is based on an observation that can be relativised by taking into account the socio-historical contexts. For example, Rubens allegedly wrote a letter in which he

inquires for French women to pose as models. Based on this letter, it is often assumed that he regularly drew nude women from life. Portraying undressed women in his studio fits the picture of a man full of relish, an image that was wrongly imposed on Rubens on the basis of his works. As was shown, Rubens's cultural context makes the presence of nude female models (in his studio or elsewhere) utterly unlikely. A strong awareness of the historical context is also crucial when interpreting drawings or his paintings. Consequently, the assessment of 17th-century customs and practices preceded the evaluation of Rubens's particular circumstances.

In the following chapter, Rubens's workshop was discussed. In line with the custom of his time, Rubens employed a large workshop, which was necessary for many reasons, not least due to his social standing and his other occupations. Apart from these factors that pertain to Rubens's particular situation, only a large workshop could have generated such an extensive œuvre. By evaluating written sources, it was possible to show key aspects of how Rubens ran his workshop. For instance, it was highlighted that a strong stylistic conformity between his own work and that of his employees was fundamental to Rubens. This insight is key for evaluating the single-handed status of his paintings, as it makes the practice of searching for the hand of one of his pupils in his paintings challenging. In this respect, the often-cited letter to Sir Dudley Carleton and similar material was examined, as was Rubens's attitude towards his high-standing public image, which would have kept him from placing emphasis on the carrying out of manual labour.

In the next chapter, Rubens's preparatory process for paintings was analysed and the works were discussed regarding their possible artistic purpose. One can distinguish between works made without a specific composition in mind – such as *ricordi* – and those works that were made on an ad-hoc basis in support of a particular painting. Although Rubens's preparatory process can be characterised as very heterogeneous, the most commonly-used materials and techniques were assessed, including – for instance – his distinctive, haphazardly-done *crabbelingen*. The details of Rubens's artistic procedures and the most commonly-chosen materials was outlined in preparation for the subsequent discussion to establish criteria against which works could be compared in specific cases.

The close look at Rubens's technique and procedure inevitably led to the issue of determining single-handed execution and the difficulties associated with this line of questioning were examined. This included a short assessment of the "method" (rather the "set of methods") of connoisseurship, which is often considered outdated in the present scholarly climate, despite the lack of real alternatives. Furthermore, the existence of Rubens's core autograph work was evaluated, with the result that for the vast majority of works a collaborative painting process must be accepted.

There are only very few criteria pointing towards single-handed executions: for instance, some paintings can most likely be considered autograph works due to their distinct private content. In any case, every work that left Rubens's studio should be seen as "a Rubens", irrespective of the master's personal involvement, if the historical dimension is to be taken seriously.

All of the above findings were eventually utilised to form a concrete method by which Rubens's preparatory process can be examined, and this approach was exemplified in the presented case study. Besides the usual emphasis on a work's overall stylistic conformity, special emphasis was placed on a preliminary work's capacity to find inclusion in the specific design process for which the work was created. For this purpose, the preparatory process of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" altarpiece was chosen given that all steps of the preparatory process are preserved and should theoretically offer a continuous progression towards the finished composition. Furthermore, the details of the commission are roughly known: the altarpiece itself was made to order for important patrons for a public spot in a church, which indicates that the work was completed with the highest possible effort.

Contrary to common beliefs, the existing preliminary versions of the composition (both on paper and panel) cannot all be convincingly assembled into one coherent composition-finding process. For instance, the Stockholm drawing (Fig. 7) has previously been eliminated from the sequence in favour of the newfound drawing in the *Metropolitan Museum* (Fig. 19). Nonetheless, the Stockholm sheet is still informative insofar as that it shows a reduced composition. This process is very much in line with other reductions of the composition found in other versions of the subject, such as the M. Knoedler oil sketch (Fig. 25): both works show the same inclination of cutting out figures for the benefit of a less-crowded composition. In this respect, the M. Knoedler sketch can be ranked between the Frankfurt sketch (Fig. 20) and the Stockholm drawing, as it shows a less-crowded composition than the former, but more figures than the latter. The comparison between these works allowed for the insight that reducing existing compositions was an established procedure: in all probability, a task with which Rubens's pupils or employees were habitually entrusted. Furthermore, the numerous copies clearly show that Rubens's designs were openly accessible within the studio.

It was also established that the Frankfurt sketch can be categorised as a reduced version of the composition instead of a preliminary work. This claim was backed by numerous arguments such as a shift in image content, as well as existent stylistic discrepancies. The similarities between this sketch and the composition of the altarpiece are evident. However, based on the presented examination of the work, it was identified as an adaptation of the composition, done chronologically after the *modello* in Berlin.

The latter oil sketch was more convincing as a first design, not least due to its outstanding material quality. The Frankfurt sketch could have comprised of a demanding task for a pupil and was perhaps intended as a design for a further, autonomous work. The copies done after this sketch – such as the sketch found in Salzburg – further confirm that the compositions were openly accessible to the workshop as templates.

Overall, the study of the numerous copies after the different versions of the "*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*" composition resulted in the reorganisation of the chronological succession of the existing works while simultaneously offering insights into Rubens's production process, as well as his workshop organisation. For instance, what has been said about drawings – namely that they served as a teaching tool for Rubens's pupils and were copied within the workshop – can also be extended to oil sketches. Copying oil sketches was possibly a further step in a pupil's training, as they would have constituted an ideal teaching medium before a pupil was capable of accomplishing the important task of making large-sized copies after Rubens's paintings independently. Moreover, designing variations of existing compositions that variegate the master's figurative arrangements was convincingly part of the workshop's practice and posed a more challenging task than copying existing material.

Some questions had to remain unanswered; for instance, a thorough technical investigation of the oil sketch in the *Salzburg Museum* would potentially shed additional light on its connection to the Frankfurt sketch, a link that can only be strongly assumed at this point. The two works show similar markings on the bottom of the panel and – for instance – a dendrochronological investigation of the Salzburg sketch could potentially reaffirm the assumed ties between the two works. Furthermore, in some cases missing artworks such as the lost work from the *Wallraf-Richartz-Museum* (Fig. 31) stood in the way of answering certain questions unconditionally.

It is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the methodology, which may have affected the results in the course of the study. First, the major weakness of any case study analysis has to be mentioned: although this study was based on a case that is strongly representative of Rubens's work, additional cases would presumably be able to offer further insights into a wider spectrum of his practice and the general validity of the results could strongly benefit from further confirmation of the findings. A single example is limited by a reduced comparability and thus a limited generalizability, which is why further cases of preparatory processes – even those with a slighter variation of works – would be helpful. The abundance of Rubens's preparatory material available would certainly allow for further comprehensive studies of specific design processes in this vein: the same approach presented in this dissertation could certainly be applied to a variety of examples. Increasing the number of cases with similar focus would reinforce the findings identified in this dissertation, and potentially allow for further insights into Rubens's preparatory

work and workshop practice. It is also important to note that the case analysed was a successful implementation of the method, but not all preparatory works can be assigned to a specific process or a specific finished painting.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the research presented in this dissertation (most particularly in the case study) confirmed general principles that apply to all works by Rubens: the fact that Rubens employed a workshop has to factor into the evaluation of his work insofar as that single-handed execution cannot be considered a determining factor in establishing a work's attribution. An altarpiece designed by Rubens, executed by his employees and possibly touched up by the master himself has to be declared "a real Rubens", irrespective of the degree to which his involvement can be detected. When applying the same principle to the preparatory designs, it becomes clear that sketches such as the oil sketch in the *Städel Museum* cannot be regarded as lesser artworks due to their connection to the workshop. To the contrary, this particular work has to be considered an irreplaceable document of the workshop practices that took place in Rubens's studio. Inventions by the workshop have to be equally valued, especially since they are just as much a testimony to Rubens's talents: his talent as the master of a large workshop. The art historical perspective should be detached from the notion of the genius painter when evaluating what determines "a Rubens".

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Stuttgarter Akademieschriften

Modi Operandi in Rubens's Workshop

Peter Paul Rubens's extensive œuvre comprises more than 1500 paintings, as well as preparatory material such as drawings and oil sketches. As was customary at the time, the master painter employed a multi-person workshop and his staff and pupils were significantly involved in his artistic output. This collaborative working process complicates the issue of attributing Rubens's work by today's standards of single-handed execution.

The publication highlights the procedures of the workshop by examining the socio-historical circumstances and written sources, while the preparatory process was assessed based on the case study of the high altarpiece of the Augustinian Church in Antwerp. The drawings and sketches associated with the creation of this painting were understood not only as evidence of creative processes but also as the results of division of labor and Rubens's teaching practice.

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